

# Living All of Life in the Presence of God

*Epistle of James*

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Turn in your Bibles to James 4. We're going to be looking again at verses 13 to 17, a passage we've been looking at for the last two Sundays and today really focusing in on verse 17 and we're going to see that this is really the application of the passage, even more pointedly in verse 17. The title of the message, I started to title it Part 3, but that just doesn't communicate. You know, basically the message of the last two weeks was the hidden sinfulness in our hearts, pride and presumption, and I think that's what the issue, the problem he's dealing with is the hidden sinfulness in our hearts of pride and presumption. This hidden sin is revealed, James is going to, we'll see again as we read this, this hidden sin of pride and presumption is revealed in the way we speak about our future. It's completely hidden. It seems, as you really look at the passage honestly and openly, it's surprising how harsh his comments are about what's apparently kind of a minor offense because he basically says, "When you say I'm going to go to such-and-such a place and I'm going to spend such-and-such an amount of time there and I'm going to do such-and-such," that you are committing an audacious crime against God. "Well, James, are you against all planning?" Well, no. Scripture makes clear we're supposed to plan but what we've seen is that the problem is when we plan, we have a tendency to plan and forget God; that really and that is an audacious thing to do. It's something that a Christian should not do, to forget God in our planning.

So I was going to make it Part 3, the hidden sinfulness in our heart, pride and presumption, part 3, but I decided that let's go ahead and get to the positive application in the title. So the title is not what I just said so just mark through that if you started to write that down. The title of the message is "Living All of Life in the Presence of God." Living all of life in the presence of God, because what James is concerned to address is the calling of the Christian is to learn that every part of your life is to be lived in the active presence of God; that everything is about the Lord; that there is no distinction between the religious and the non-religious, there is no distinction biblically between the sacred and the secular; that all of life is to be lived in the presence of God, loving God and honoring God, even planning for your future if it's business or your home, school, whatever it is, it should be lived in the presence of God. So the title of the message "Living All of Life in the Presence of God."

We see James is going to address the way we speak about our futures. Let's read verses 13 to 17. James 4:13,

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we thank you for your word and as we come to seek to understand your word, we acknowledge that unless you will that we understand it, we cannot; unless you grant us grace to open our minds, to open our hearts, we will not see and understand wonderful things from your law. So we pray that you would, by your Spirit, do what only you can do. Let your word come into us, into our minds, into our hearts, and to change us and grant us repentance and faith and help us follow Jesus more closely. We pray in his name. Amen.*

James is essentially saying that when we plan our lives like we do, I mean, it's so easy to do this. I love how James is so direct and when I'm reading, I try to connote I think the way the tone of what he's trying to say. He's not as encouraging and soft-spoken as maybe some other apostles. He's under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit like every other one, every word of this is perfect, but God uses the personalities and the life experiences of each person that he writes his Scripture through and so we see James is a distinct personality. Very direct. "Hey, you think that this is okay. No, it's not. You're boasting in your arrogance. That's what you're doing. It's not that you're off, hey, you need to make a little adjustment, no, you are boasting in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Stop it! Repent! Change what you're doing." He's essentially saying if we could hear ourselves rightly when we go about our lives, and I would say that this is so easy, just the things that we do.

I've thought about this even this week, I find myself remembering, praise the Lord, to do what this text is saying, don't just go about my business without praying and thanking God and asking his blessing and asking him to help, "Help me," because there are certain things we just tend to think that we're supposed to do. Now we are. We are supposed to plan and do things. It's not that we wait every moment. He's not saying go through your life and say, "Should I take the next step, Lord? I'm waiting for you to tell me. Do I feel a peace in my heart?" No, that's not what he's saying. He's not saying that. That's nonsense. You're to live your Christian life with your mind, you are to apply common sense, but as you do it, there is to be an underlying sense in which you are prayerful and dependent upon God and submitted to God as you go about doing those same things.

It won't change a lot of the particulars of what you do. You've got to deal with some practical issues in life. Maybe you have to buy a car or sell a car, well, there are certain things you've got to do, right? You've got to do research, yes. Go online. Be wise. You don't sit there and pray, I remember hearing one of the guys I heard preach one time about this issue, decision making, and he was saying somebody made a spiritual issue out of, "What's the right color, Lord? Should I have a blue car or a red car?" And they were praying about that and laboring over it. We're not talking about that. That's silly. I mean, you should pray and ask the Lord to help you get the right car and be wise about it, but the color is not the issue. Maybe the amount of money you're spending on it could be. Maybe the fact of who you are incorporating in the process. If you're married, you should be talking to your wife more maybe than you are. There are biblical principles that inform it but it's not that kind of thing that James is getting at. What he's getting at is an underlying heart attitude that treats life as if it's my life to be lived for my purpose and my goals and, yeah, there are parts of my life I give to God, but this part is mine. James says that, if we could see it as it is, that is wicked and evil and God hates that in our lives and he wants us to change.

We said it's not that far from, remember I shared last week the words, part of the poem "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley which is basically a statement. It's a well-written poem but it's a statement of human deity and it's a blasphemous assertion of a man's defiance of God. Read it carefully and look at the biblical allusions he's making. He talks about as the years go on, he's unafraid. "It matters not how strait the gate, how much is written on the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." I think James is saying, "Listen, sometimes you and I sound more like that than we would ever imagine in the way we talk about our lives." That's unacceptable.

So he gives us in verse 17 the practical application of how to deal with that. Verse 17 is basically, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." This is a principle that tells us something about how we can understand sin. Sin is not just when you go over something that the Lord says, "Do not do this," and you do it. That's a transgression of God's law. "You shall not commit adultery. You shall not lie. You shall not murder." When you go over those boundaries, you transgress the law. Those are negative commands. He says you also have to obey all the positive commands. When the Lord tells you to do something and you don't do it, that's sin and it might be tempting just to preach a message on that principle itself but we have to see that it's connected to what's immediately gone before.

He chooses to say that at this moment because he's trying to call us to action on what he's just been talking about and we see that because it's made explicit by the word "therefore." An inferential conjunction introduces this verse, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." He's basically saying, "All that I've just been telling you about you now know, and therefore you must do, and if you don't, your sin is even aggravated," because even the greater knowledge makes you more accountable. That's what Jesus is talking about in Luke 12 when he says, "To him who much is given is much required." The more knowledge you have, the more accountable you are. You are accountable for it but the accountability becomes even more profound.

So we need to apply this and we see this, the three points to consider our thoughts under this morning, three points in the outline, and the first point is the urgency of doing God's will in every area of life. The urgency of doing God's will in every area of life. That's essentially the thrust of verse 17 and particularly considering it in context. He's wanting us to change the way we think about our future, the way we think about our lives. He wants God to be at the center of our lives even when we're thinking about our long-term future, planning for college, for retirement. He wants God to be at the center of our thinking. He wants the Lord to be at the center of our thinking about what's going to happen next year. He wants the Lord to be at the center of our thinking when we think about what's going to happen next month. He wants our relationship with Christ to be at the center of our minds when we think about what's going to happen next week, tomorrow, today the rest of the day. God is to be at the center of our thinking.

So the urgency of doing God's will in every area of life. We see this as we unpack it a little bit here. Let's look at verse 17, this first point, the word "know." "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." The idea of the word that he uses here is a fullness of knowledge; one who is, actually there are a couple of different main words used for "know," k-n-o-w, in the Greek New Testament. There are several but the two main words, one of which is this word here, "oida," it comes from a word "to see." You see something and once you see it, you know it. So the idea is you come to know something with an element of certainty. "Therefore, to one who has come to see something and now knows it," and I think that's helpful in this passage as we were talking about this is the area of hidden sin for many of us, for most of us. We haven't seen how we are dishonoring the Lord in this area. He says, "Now, though, you have come to see it. You know it."

And what is it that you know? You know the good, or it says in the NASB, "the right thing to do." Literally the Greek word is "good." "To him who knows good to do and does not do it." You know the good, that is, that which is morally virtuous; that which is appealing and pleasing to God. You know but you're not doing it. You know that you should be doing it, he says. It's the right thing to do. You know the good to do and you're not doing it, that's sin.

Interesting, James keeps coming back to the same basic theme that his whole book is about. He says, "If you know but you don't do, it's unacceptable." We see the theme of the whole book is, remember in James 1:22-25, the difference between hearing and doing. In fact, in James 1:22 he says, "Prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves for if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror, for once he has looked at himself and gone away, has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." He says it's not that you hear the word, it's that you do the word. It's not that you see the word, it's that you do the word. It's not that you know the word, it's that you do the word. Now you have to hear, you have to see, you have to know but you don't stop there, you do, and this

is the point here in James 4:17. Now that you've come to know this, you must do it. You've got to put it into practice. That's what we want to talk about, how do we put this into practice.

Now this idea of doing is something we see throughout the New Testament. I mean, Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:24-27 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, remember he says, "The one who hears these words of mine and does them is like a man who built his house on the rock," and the wind came, the storms blew, the rain fell, the floodwaters rose and the house stood because it was built upon a rock. "The one who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a man who built his house upon the sand." The storm came, the rain fell, the wind blew, the floodwaters rose, and that house fell and great was its fall. What's the difference? They both heard the words of Jesus but only one did the words of Jesus. That makes all the difference in the world, doing the word, doing the truth that he's called us to do.

So he says in your planning and speaking about the future, you need to put God at the center. Let's talk about how we can do that. The first point, the urgency of doing God's will in every area of life. That's the first point, now the second point, and these next two points are really talking about how we put it into practice. The first point in a sense says, just do it, and the second two points say how, answer how. And I think to put it into practice we have to remember something of last week, a couple of principles that we talked about last time. We have to think about who God is actively and we have to think about who we are, and if we think about who God is and we think about who we are, then we realize that our purpose in life is to live our lives in the presence of God.

The Lord makes this really clear in the passage about how great God is and how we tend to underestimate him. We spent more time talking about this last week but I need to just summarize again a little bit of the importance of the phrase in verse 15, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." James says this is what we ought to say. Now, is he saying that we ought to change the way we speak about our future long term and immediate? Is he saying we ought to change the way we talk about it? Yes, he is but he's not merely saying we just need to change the way we talk about it. It's not just that now we need to always say, "If the Lord wills," which is a good idea. He's saying that we should have that but really that should flow from our hearts because God is not just concerned with outward form, he's concerned with the inward attitude of the heart and this is really a window into our hearts. So what we need is to change the attitude of our hearts toward the Lord and then speak accordingly. If the attitude in our heart changes, there will be a difference in the way we say the things that we say and we'll be a helpful reminder to each other of who God is.

Now, so to get to our hearts, one of the things we're going to need to do, the second point is two principles upon which to meditate. Two principles upon which to meditate. How do you do this in your life? Well, the first thing, second point. The second point is two principles upon which to meditate and the first principle is to remember who God is and you see that in the phrase, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

We saw that the verb "the Lord wills" is in the aorist tense. It's the Greek tense which is a Greek past tense but in Greek verbs the tense of the verb past, present, future, isn't just about time as much as it is in English. Our past, present, future tenses are more about time. In Greek, they're also kind of action that is described in these various tenses. In the aorist tense particularly, though it's a past tense usually, it's about a punctiliar kind of action, that is, a point in time. It emphasizes that action happens in a very particular place, particular moment. Present tense action isn't just about time, the present time, it's about a continuous ongoing action. Well, almost all of these verbs in the passage are in the present tense in the Greek except for, the only word in the aorist is that verb "wills, if the Lord wills," and the idea is I think by contrast James is pointing out because you would expect him just to go ahead and use "if the Lord wills" in an ongoing way, if he's ongoingly willing you to live, you're going to live. But I think he uses the aorist tense to say this kind of, to emphasize this, that the Lord has to make a decisive determination at every moment of your life to keep you alive. This is how big God is. He's exploding a deistic view of the world; that there's a deity out there and he created everything like a clock-maker and he left it to run on its own and he's not that involved in your life. The picture that the Bible gives is that in him we live and move and have our being; that he holds all things together by the word of his power; that in him you consist, you hold together. So he wills you to hold together at every moment and if he continues to will us to stay alive and to breathe, we will stay alive and we will breathe.

It's so interesting. He doesn't say, "If the Lord wills, you know, we're going to go here." No, first of all, "If the Lord wills, we will live. If the Lord doesn't will, we won't live." That changes your view of who God is and it changes our view of ourselves.

"If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that," and he also holds not only our life in his hands, he holds our ability to do anything in his hands. He's the one who gives us every ability that we have, though we have to work and we have to cooperate, we don't just sit back and let go and let God. No, we need to study hard. We need to work hard. Yes. Yes. Yes. We need to eat right. Yes. But if you're working hard and you're studying hard and you're eating right, you can know that God is enabling you at every moment by his grace to do so, and that if he stops for a moment, you will not have the ability to do anything.

I was talking to a friend of mine, I have a pastor friend I've met with and prayed with for 23 years, actually we went to school together at Reformed Theological Seminary, Alan Johnson who is pastor of Old Peachtree Presbyterian Church just about a mile from here. So we were in school together in Jackson, Mississippi back in the late 80s. I come to Atlanta to pastor this church in 1993, he comes to be pastor of Old Peachtree in January of 1995 and so he's been there for 23 years and we've been praying together once a month or sometimes more than that for almost that whole 23 years. So he's a dear friend. I appreciate him so much and we talk through various things as we have gone through life together.

One of the things he was sharing with me on Friday, I prayed with him this Friday at his church, and so he shared with me about something that happened to his daughter. I knew

the last time we met in May, Rebekah had just graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in teaching and she already had a job lined up at Jefferson High School and things were going great. She's walking with the Lord. Anyway, he was sharing with me about her life and so he sent me a text when we were on vacation that something had happened that she was in the hospital and she had had some bleeding on the brain. Well, this was the first time I had the opportunity to really hear the whole story and he laid out for me the whole story of what happened. Here's this 22-year-old young lady and she's just getting a job to work for the summer to bridge the time between school ending and her teaching position starting. She went for a job interview and has always been in great health and as she's having the interview, she starts feeling really weird and she realizes she needs to wrap things up and she needs to get home. She thinks she's getting sick, like some kind of virus is coming over her. She's starting to feel a little nauseated, a little disoriented.

So she starts walking. She says goodbye, starts walking to the car, well, the lady can tell by the way she's acting that something's not right and she walks behind her with her and Rebekah bumps into furniture on the way out. Well, it turns out she had a bleed on the brain at the back of her brain stem. They don't know why it happened. They don't know if it'll happen again, but for four days she was hospitalized and had all kinds of tests being run. Basically she had a stroke at 22 years old and she was not able to do the things that she could do. Her memories were gone, I mean the ability to remember what was happening was gone.

Now praise the Lord, she's almost back. He says 95%, she's back to normal. She's already moved back out. She had to stay with them for a while after she got out of the hospital and then last Monday she went back over to get an apartment with her friend in Athens and to get ready for school. We were talking about that and I was just sharing with him as I've been preaching through this passage, I said, "You know, Alan, it sounds like the Lord's really, I know this is going to be so hard for her," hearing him and encouraging him and hurting with him because it's harder for us to see our children go through that than it is for us, isn't it? We'd rather ourselves go through something like that than to have your child. But one of the things we were talking about was how the Lord does show us that the reality is according to this passage, your life is that fragile every moment, you just don't know it. Rebekah Johnson has come face-to-face with that reality but it's really true for all of us. If the Lord wills, you will live, and if the Lord wills, you will be able to do what you planned to do, but if he doesn't, you won't.

Now that's a little bit alarming on the front end but once you put that in context with the Gospel, it's the most wonderful thing in the world. It means you're not off as a free agent on your own battling life. God is walking along with you, upholding you, and everything that's happening around you is happening according to his plan, for his glory, his purposes, and your good. But he's much bigger than we tend to think.

So we have to remember who he is. He's sovereign over everything. That's what he's claiming. He's claiming he's sovereign over absolutely everything. We have to remember who we are, we are in his hand, but the goal of our life is to be lived in his presence. He

wants us to live our lives as if the truth is the truth, not to live as a practical deist. Remember I mentioned that, that my professor in seminary used to talk about that? Practical deism. To live like God's a clock-maker, that he's not that interested. He's off doing other things. He's not really that interested in the details of your life. Theism, t-h-e-i-s-m, not d-e-i-s-m, deism, that's the clock-maker theology. Theism is based on the infinite personal God of the Bible; that the God who is infinite and in control and sovereign over everything is also intimately concerned with our lives. He knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows your thoughts from afar. He knows everything about you.

This is the God of the Bible and so we are to live our lives in his presence. Our goal should be to live life in the presence of God. In fact, one of the phrases that I think is really helpful is something that theologians sometimes speak of, coram Deo, c-o-r-a-m D-e-o. It's Latin, not Greek. It's Latin. It means "in the presence of God or before the face of God."

R. C. Sproul, there's a helpful article I read this week by him. R. C. went home to be with the Lord this year and a theologian that had a great impact in my life personally and probably many of you. I want to read to you this blog about what it means to live life in the presence of God, coram Deo. This is R. C. writing,

"Recently a friend asked me in all earnestness this question. "What's the big idea of the Christian life? [I mean, what is the big idea that I can wrap my life around?] He was interested in the overarching, ultimate goal of the Christian life.

To answer his question, I gave him a Latin term. I said, "The big idea of the Christian life is coram Deo. Coram Deo captures the essence of the Christian life."

This phrase literally refers to something that takes place in the presence of, or before the face of, God. To live coram Deo is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze.

To be aware of the presence of God is also to be acutely aware of His sovereignty. The uniform experience of the saints is to recognize that if God is God, then He is indeed sovereign.

Living under divine sovereignty involves more than a reluctant submission to sheer sovereignty that is motivated out of a fear of punishment. It involves recognizing that there is no higher goal than offering honor to



God. Our lives are to be living sacrifices, oblations [drink offerings] offered in a spirit of adoration and gratitude.

To live all of life coram Deo is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God."

Now listen to what Sproul writes next.

"The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections, one the religious and the other the nonreligious [the Christian who does that] has failed to grasp the big idea. The big idea is that all of life is religious or none of life is religious."

It's all or nothing, Sproul says. Back to Sproul.

"To divide life between the religious and the nonreligious is itself a sacrilege.

This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a steelmaker, attorney, or homemaker coram Deo, then that person is acting every bit as religiously as a soul-winning evangelist who fulfills his vocation."

Did you get that? The steelmaker who is living his life before the presence of God as he does the act of making his steel and doing what he's supposed to do, if he's doing it before the face of God, in the honor of God, that's just as religious as the man evangelizing the lost person, the evangelist. That's the way God sees it.

"It means that David was as religious when he obeyed God's call to be a shepherd as he was when he was anointed with the special grace of kingship. It means that Jesus was every bit as religious when He worked in His father's carpenter shop as He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Integrity is found where men and women live their lives in a pattern of consistency. It is a pattern that functions the same basic way in church as out of church. It is a life that is open before God. It is a life in which all that is done is done as to the Lord.

Coram Deo ... before the face of God. That's the big idea. Next to this idea our other goals and ambitions become mere trifles."

This is exactly what James is talking about, that we are to live our life before the face of God and if we live our life before the face of God, then the planning that we do and the necessary details of life that we have, the mundane things that have to be done are done with a different heart attitude and this all becomes joy when we put it in light of the Gospel; when we remember that who we are, we are by the grace of God. Jesus Christ has died in our place.

One of the most encouraging things to me as I think about how I'm supposed to live coram Deo and I was applying this even this week, you know, going about mundane things, was trying to sell a car at CarMax. That's pretty mundane and they offered me way less than I thought it was worth. It was really disappointing. Well, you're going about something super practical, right? So I'm thinking as I'm going about this, the Lord reminds me of this principle that I'm studying to preach on. This, too, should be an act of worship. This, too, should be done in the presence of God. "Lord, should I take this offer he's giving me or not?" I mean, we should pray about it. It doesn't mean that you sit there and wait for some kind of mystical feeling. No, that's actually foolish and wrong. Even this idea of looking for a peace, you need to be careful about that. But pray and then do what seems right but don't forget to pray.

So I had to remember to pray again, especially after he told me what he was offering me. But that's an act of worship. This should be done in the worship of God and it's so encouraging because, you know, it also helps you to deal with the fact that the guy didn't offer me what he should have, I think. I mean, he obviously disagrees. They've got their formulas and all that. Remembering who I am and that I tend to forget so quickly and I'm not thinking like I should right now about the Lord and honoring him, I'm off doing my thing. And I realized that and I'm convicted about that and I see that this is wrong. One of the most encouraging things is the Gospel because I don't have to come to my Father and confess my sin and just wallow in my sin. Now, I do come and I repent and, "Lord, I'm sorry. Here I am, I'm forgetting to even apply. I've just been studying about this just a little while ago and now here I am forgetting it." That would be only, it might be a lot more discouraging if I didn't have the opportunity to look to Christ because what I'm able to do according to the Gospel is, the good news is that God sent his Son in the world to live a life of perfect righteousness, to then offer himself as a sacrifice of atonement on the cross to pay for our sins, to take all of our sins out of the way and to give us in exchange his righteousness. So I was able to say to the Lord, "I thank you that Jesus is my righteousness and his meat and his drink was to do the will of the Father. He never once forgot to be about your business."

How encouraging that is and then that motivates me to want to live for him just out of gratitude. I'm not trying to earn anything. How good that is. How freeing that is, but how wonderful it is to live life in the presence of God. In fact, that brings us to the third point. These two principles to meditate on: remember who God is, remember who you are and meditate on it. Think about it regularly. I mean, think about the fact that your life really is in his hand. Think about the fact that your ability really is in his hand. Discipline yourself to think about that, to think about how frail your life is and how frail we are. Now the next thing, the third point. We've said the first point was the urgency of doing God's will in every area of life; the second point was two principles upon which to meditate; the third point is two practices to implement. Two practices to implement and they are simply: ask him for everything, that's the first one, ask him about everything, ask him for everything. I don't mean ask him for everything, I mean every time you're going to ask him something or you want something, ask him. Think about what you want. Like James said in this very passage, remember James 4:2, he says, "You have not because you ask

not." So a lot of things we don't have is because we're not asking. But then he also says, "You ask and don't receive because you ask with the wrong motives." Well, check your motives but when you ask, when you have a real need, ask him. "Lord, this selling this car is something you want me to do, then I ask you to make it happen. This is your business. Everything I have belongs to you, Lord. Everything I am belongs to you. You've given me everything so it's your stuff. I'm just a steward. So if you want this to happen, then make it happen." I feel lighter even as I say that now about my car, actually. I feel a little bit lighter about that. I'm feeling better already.

You ask him for everything and you thank him for everything. Thank him for everything. Thank him in everything. Those are the two points. Those are the two practices to implement. Make a practice of asking God for everything that you need and make a practice of continually thanking him for everything that you receive and thanking him in everything when you don't receive it.

It's amazing how powerful that is and you don't have to feel it to do it. Like that's actually a completely unbiblical principle. The world says if you don't feel something, you're inauthentic if you do it. That's not biblical. That's acting like your feelings are a perfect guide. Your feelings are not a perfect guide. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Why would you want to listen to your heart? Do what's in your heart, that is foolishness. Do what the word of God says. Now the good news is the word of God is going to change your heart and it's going to make your heart more trustworthy over time.

"But I don't feel thankful." Well, thank him anyway. In fact, the Scripture is real clear. He wants us asking all the time and thanking all the time. This is what God's agenda is to keep us walking in a living relationship with him, a personal, ongoing, 24 hour a day relationship with him. God wants us to walk with him. This is the way he's dealt with all of his people throughout history. I mean think about it, this is his way. When he says to Abraham, he calls Abraham to himself, what does he say? "Go to the land and here is your GPS and it's actually located in this spot and I'll catch up with you in a month or so when you get there." He says, "You go to the land I will show you." Then when he takes the people out of Egypt, what does he do? He appears before them in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day and they are to follow that pillar. The glorious presence of God manifested and they are to follow him and he, then, leads them through all kinds of difficulties.

We began to see last time about Deuteronomy 8. I mentioned that as your homework last week was to read Deuteronomy 8. We won't do a test on who read Deuteronomy 8 but if you haven't, go back and read it this week. But what he basically says is when he took them out, he tells us this is the heart of God. What did he do? Moses at the end of his ministry, 40-year ministry, he's now with the people about to go into the Promised Land. They've had that 40-year delay because they wouldn't go in when God took them in just a short time after leaving Egypt. Now he's reminding them and he says, "Why did the Lord lead you in the way that he led you?" That's essentially the question he's asking. I mean you think about it, he led them out and then he leads them, they make a turn on their

journey and they go back down south and get by the Red Sea, against the Red Sea. This isn't the way. I mean, if we had our GPS, we'd be like, "No, he's saying go this way. Something's wrong. Let me get Google Maps instead of whatever this Apple thing is. This is not right. This is not the way to Canaan." And it wasn't. Why did he take them down there? Because he wanted the Egyptian army to catch up to them and he wanted them to have no place to run.

That's exactly, there's no other possibility. That's the purpose. Why? Not so that they would grumble and complain like they did, so that they would ask him and thank him. "Lord, deliver us! You wouldn't surely not have brought us out of Egypt to have this happen to us. Now deliver us. Show us your glory. Thank you, Lord, for this opportunity to remember how much we need you because we need you. We don't have military training. We don't have weapons and the greatest army in the world is coming after us. We need you!" They didn't do that. Moses did it for them but they didn't see that but that's what God was teaching them.

He takes them through the Red Sea, destroys the Egyptian army, they see his glory again. "Look at the God that we serve!" Then he takes them out through the wilderness and Deuteronomy 8 says it's a great and terrible wilderness filled with serpents and scorpions, no water. "He led you in an area where there was no bread, there was no water." Why? I mean, God's sovereign over the whole universe, he could have made a path of, their path to Canaan could've had gardens all over the sides of it, could it not? Is that too hard for the Lord? I mean, did he not plan ahead? Could you not go ahead? I mean, he could've had the barbecue pits, well, they wouldn't have had any pork but it would've been brisket. Brisket and, anyway. I'm going too far, it's almost lunchtime. But he could've had the food lined up along the way and they could've stopped and eaten and, man, they would've had a party, but he didn't do that. Why? Because he loved them too much.

I would've liked it that way. That's how I would've drawn it up. "Lord, just go ahead and plant the gardens. We'll walk through. We'll stop. We'll gather the stuff. We'll make our meals. You know, it'll be fantastic." The Lord said, "No, I'm going to lead you through a desert where there is no hope of finding food so that I can feed you with manna from heaven on a daily basis. I'm going to lead you where there is no water so that I can make water come out of the rock, I can provide water supernaturally more than once to provide for your needs so that you will see that the relationship I want to have with you is one where you know that you need me all the time." And he's trying to give them a window to see how dependent we are all the time because we think we're independent, we're okay, we've got it all figured out. We think our lives are indestructible, that we're okay. Especially when you're young, you think everything's going well, you're going to live forever. No, your life is in his hands.

He's trying to teach them that. This is the way he does everything he does. Think about it when he calls David or Joseph. I mean he says, "You're going to be this, you're going to be the king," and then David spends the next more than a dozen years running for his life. I mean, somewhere around that number. I don't remember exactly how many years but it's a number of years Saul's going after him. He's running for his life. Why did you

anoint him? "This is my way to show my chosen ones that I love so much that you need me more than you can ever imagine and I want you to have the joy of seeing me meet your needs and be everything that you need." And if you could ask David and ask Moses and ask Abraham, if you could change the way God did it now, would you? They would say never. We didn't just get bread, we got to understand the living bread of life. We got to understand that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God so that we learned to live life in his presence.

Ask him for everything. Thank him for everything. And he says to do this, I mean he says Luke 18:1, "You ought always to pray and not to faint." Luke 18, that amazing story about the woman who has an issue where she's been treated unfairly and she goes to the judge and the judge is ungodly, he doesn't care, he's unjust, he ignores her. She goes day after day after day after day after day and finally Jesus says, "Though the man is unjust and he doesn't care, just to get her off his back, he grants her her request." Okay, well that's a cool story but what's the point? Jesus says, "Pray like that." Now stop and think about that. Why should we have to pray to the God who knows everything about us, more than we know ourselves, why should we have to pray like that? "Lord, you already know. I don't think we should have to pray anyway. You know. I mean, why do you want us to pray?" Because he wants a relationship with us. He wants us to have a relationship with him, the joy of having that kind of living relationship with him. So he puts you in circumstances where you have a need and you pray and you don't get it and you have a need and you pray and you don't get it, and you have a need and you pray and you pray and you pray and you pray and you don't get it. What does that say? He loves you. That's not the way I would have written that but that's the truth. He wants you to know the joy of knowing that he is your true reward.

This is what the saints got to understand over time. God was telling them this and I love what he says to Abraham when he comes to him and Abraham still hadn't had a son. He told him, "I'm going to give you a son." It's been 10 years. Remember he made him wait 24 years before a pregnancy happened. "I'm going to make you a great nation." I would wish you wait until I was 98. Give me just one year of waiting but 24 years he waited until he's so old that it's hopeless. But in Genesis 15 when he's been waiting 10 years, the Lord shows up again to speak to him. He doesn't speak to him every day, he just shows up to speak to him and he says, "I am your shield and your very great reward." That's what God says to Abraham. "I'm the one that protects you and I, myself, am your reward."

You see, the reality is you and I were created to know the living God and that's what we long for more than anything else in the world. We don't know that we long for that more but that's what we were made for, to stand in the presence of God, to see the glory of who he is, to gladly reflect back to him the radiance of his worth. That is the most supremely enjoyable, dignifying thing a human being can do and the Lord is interested in showing that to his people and so he says, "I want you to learn to ask me for everything and to thank me for everything. I want you to learn what it means to pray without ceasing," 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Pray and don't stop. The next verse. I said ask him and thank him, both are in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and 18. 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "pray without ceasing."

Verse 18 says, "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

So continually ask him and continually give thanks so when things do work, you thank him. "Lord, thank you. Thank you that you made that happen. Thank you." When we thank him for our food, we really should be thanking him for our food not as we think as sort of like a formality. "No, you actually have made this happen. You created the elements that have turned into this vegetable or this steak. You made it then you gave me the ability to do the work that I've done and my wife the ability to fix it and the people the ability to bring it to the grocery store. You made everything happen and I thank you for that."

That's reality so that's why we have to meditate on it. You see you have to think on that, don't you? It doesn't come natural. We tend to think that we've done it. In fact, I want to read you one little passage from Deuteronomy 8. He says verse 15, well first of all, verse 14 he says, "then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God," that is, after you get into the land, you're going to be tempted for your heart to become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, "who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.'" You see, "I did all that in the wilderness so that you would know when you got in the land you would not say, 'My power and my strength made this wealth.' You know that everything that I have is from God."

So thank him continually. Thank him when it doesn't work. Thank him when it does. It's exactly what we're supposed to do all the time. Always praying and always thanking because he has a purpose. "Lord, you have a purpose that the car didn't sell. You had a purpose that they didn't give me the amount that I needed or wanted. You have a purpose in that. Praise you. And I just pray that you'll help me now continue to worship you and walk with you and show me what you want me to do." This is true in every area of life and when we learn to live that way, always asking, always thanking for everything, then we find ourselves living life in the presence of God, coram Deo, and we find that's how we were made to live. That's the big idea and God is so good to make it, he's determined to help you and me find the big idea in our lives.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank you for your faithfulness. We pray that you would help us to more deeply understand our weakness, understand our pride, our presumption. Grant us deeper repentance. Help us be diligent to do these things, to actually meditate, reflect on actively who you are and who we are and, Lord, make us able to pray more tomorrow than we did today. Help us to obey you in giving you thanks. May our lives be centered around you and as we plan our futures, as we plan our long-term futures, as we plan our*

*short-term futures, even what we're going to do tomorrow, may we use wisdom and practical knowledge and may we also most importantly continually submit to you. We belong to you. May we remember that we exist for your glory. We pray that Jesus Christ would be praised more and more and more in our lives and we pray this in his name. Amen.*