

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

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[0 : 0 0] It would be great if you could turn back in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, although today is another one of those topical ones, so there'll be some verses on the screen. And then after we have our mission partners visit us next Sunday, we'll look at an Old Testament prophet of Micah and get back into the routine of working our way through a book.

But let me begin by asking you, I wonder what kind of person are you on the screen there? Are you a glass half full kind of person or are you a glass half empty kind of person?

For those who are not familiar with this expression, a person who sees a glass of water and thinks it's half full is an optimist. And an optimist, of course, is someone who always sees the good, it's half full, and expects good outcomes no matter what.

But if someone sees a glass half empty, they are a pessimist. They look at the same glass and think it's half empty. They see the bad and expect bad outcomes.

In other words, it's describing a character of a person, a character trait. Of course, there's also the realist who just sees a glass of water. That's it. Maybe that's you instead.

[1 : 1 7] Or a physicist who sees liquid and gas. Or there's also the artist who just sees somewhere to put their brush. But generally, the expression is, which one are you, half full or half empty?

And which do you think God wants us to be? I was thinking about this and I wonder if it's actually neither. After all, the Bible tells us to recognise both good and bad.

Not to put our heads in the sand, but to lament at the bad things we see in the world. And to even expect sometimes bad outcomes like suffering and persecution.

But the Bible also tells us to see the good, to rejoice with those who rejoice. And to expect good as well. Like a world to come where there'll be no more suffering.

And so I wonder rather whether God wants us to be, not so much a glass half empty or glass half full kind of person, but a Christ-like person who seeks to please Him by doing His will.

[2 : 2 6] I mean, that's what Christ did, didn't it? Pleased God by doing His will. Pleased God by doing His will. Which, as we'll see today, involves being a glass full of thanks kind of person, actually.

Because that is God's will for us in Christ Jesus. And today, what I really want us to do is just to look at one verse in our passage, verse 18, which talks about giving thanks because it's Thanksgiving Sunday.

But first, let me briefly give you the context for that verse. Paul and Silas were in the city of Thessalonica and they shared the gospel with the people and many became Christians.

But the Jews were jealous, so they created a riot, stirred up a riot, forcing Paul and Silas to leave the city. And so Paul was worried about this young church that had just begun to believe in Jesus.

And so he sends Timothy back to the city to check on them. And in chapter 3, verse 6, we read, Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.

[3 : 35] And so with this good news that they're standing firm in the faith, that they're loving one another, Paul spends the first couple of chapters of the letter thanking God for them. And then particularly from chapter 4 and 5, encouraging them to keep living lives that please God.

So chapter 4, verse 1, he says, As for the other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

This is the kind of person God wants us to be, one who pleases Him more and more by doing His will. In fact, a couple of verses later, Paul tells us what God's will is.

This is the will of God, your sanctification. To be holy, that's what sanctified means, holy, set apart as different from the world for God, to live for Him, to please Him by doing His will like Christ.

How are they to please Him? What does this all involve? Well, Paul mentions a number of things in chapter 4 and chapter 5 and loads of things in our passage.

[4 : 55] I don't know if you heard as the Bible was being read, but there was loads of commands in our passage today. So if you've got it there in front of you, let me just quickly try and summarize so we can get to our verse for today.

So if you look at verse 12 and 13, they're about how to treat leaders. I like verse 13, hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. I showed verse 13 to my kids, actually hoping that it'd get me some more respect.

But anyway, that's what verses 12 and 13 are about, how to treat leaders. The end of verse 13, 14 and 15, is about how to care for one another, living at peace with one another, encouraging those or warning those who are lazy, encouraging the disheartened, helping the weak and so on.

It's how to care for each other, 14 and 15. Then 16 to 18, which is where our verse sits, it's about how to live every day as individual Christians.

Notice how all three actions in verse 16 to 18 are to happen all the time. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.

[6 : 12] These three verses go together. In fact, they help each other. When we rejoice, it helps us give thanks. And sometimes when we give thanks, it helps us rejoice. And when we pray, we're to give thanks as well and so on.

But they're to happen every day as individuals. That's verses 16 to 18. And then 19 to 22, about how to respond to hearing God's word in whatever context.

So we're not to reject or quench the spirit, but we're to test what we hear against the Bible. Hold on to what's good and reject what's bad, teaching.

That's how the commands are grouped together. But as I said, because it's Thanksgiving Sunday, I want us to hone in and focus on verse 18. And I want to make two points from it.

Firstly, we ought to give thanks in all circumstances. So that's point one in your outlines. And if you look at verse 18, it's quite clear that we ought to, because we're told to.

[7 : 16] It's a command, isn't it? Give thanks. It's not an optional extra for the Christian. It's meant to be part of our lives. In fact, this command is seen throughout Scripture.

For example, Ephesians 5 says a similar thing, always giving thanks to God for everything. That's pretty all-encompassing, isn't it? Or in Colossians, for example, just as you receive Christ Jesus, so continue to live your lives in him.

And notice the end? Overflowing with thankfulness. I mean, that's a really glass full of thankfulness, isn't it? Overflowing with thankfulness.

Or even at the end of our verse 18 in our passage, it says, For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. This is how God wants us to live as followers of Jesus.

This is part of what it means to please God, to live that sanctified life. God's will for us is to be a glass full of thanks kind of person.

[8 : 23] One who not only laments the bad, rejoices with the good, but can give thanks in both situations. Giving thanks is meant to be a mark of the Christian life.

Because not giving thanks is actually a mark of the non-Christian life, did you realise? And when Paul talks about in Romans 1, about God's wrath being revealed against humanity's sin, one of the reasons he gives is, for although they knew God from creation, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him.

At the heart of human sin, it's not just neglecting to treat God as God, glorifying him as God, but also not giving thanks to him as God.

That's how important giving thanks is. And in fact, not giving thanks, it leads to becoming futile and foolish. It leads to more sin. I mean, just imagine, Adam and Eve, if Adam and Eve were in the garden and they were more thankful for all the other fruit they could eat, wouldn't they not have then glorified God for his generosity?

Rather than envying the one fruit they couldn't eat and disobeying God? If only they were more thankful. So we ought to give thanks, not just because it's a command and it's God's will for us, because it also helps keep us from sin.

[9 : 57] It's like an antidote to sin. We see this elsewhere in Scripture, like in Ephesians chapter 5, where he lists all these sins, like sexual immorality, impurity, greed.

And then he talks about obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking. And notice what Paul wants us to replace with all that right at the end? Thanksgiving.

That's the antidote. The antidote to speech full of obscenity is speech full of thanks. Indeed, the antidote to immorality and greed is thanksgiving.

Because thanksgiving requires us to remember all God has given us, that we might be content and joyful, not greedy for more, whether it's more money or immorality or whatever.

Thankfulness to God encourages us to please God, not sin against God. What's more, it helps us to shine as witnesses for God.

[11 : 00] Paul writes in Philippians, for example, do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to or out at the word of life to them.

The word thanksgiving is not used here, but it's easy to see how it helps us from becoming bitter grumblers and arguers.

I used to be a primary school teacher in a Christian school and part of my job was to give the kids devotions. I had a year six class, a grade six class, and one day I pointed out this verse to them.

You know, kids, you do everything without grumbling and arguing. And one of the applications, I said, what you can do to put this verse into practice is I'm about to hand out the homework.

And so why don't you try saying thank you, which will help you not grumble about the homework. And it worked for one child.

[12 : 08] The rest decided to grumble even more just to try and tease me. But thankfulness does help us to not... And by grumble, I don't mean... We can lament at things that are wrong in our world.

We can discern who a good leader and a bad leader is. We can still do those things. By grumbling, it's about tearing down, grumbling against God as Israel did or tearing down people as the world does.

Social media is full of that kind of grumbling, that tearing down. But giving thanks helps us to be different. It helps us to stand out, to shine like stars.

Imagine being known. You know, instead of grumbling and tearing down people in the workplace or in the social gathering or the family event, you're thankful for things.

I bet that will stand you out as different. It will help us shine. Of course, giving thanks in all circumstances is not always easy, is it? And yet we can still do it, point two.

[13 : 12] Now, of course, when circumstances of life are good, when things are going well, it's easier to give thanks, isn't it? Though I often still forget. Do you? But when the circumstances of life are bad, when life is difficult or draining or almost despairing, it's hard to give thanks then, isn't it?

And yet we still can. How? Well, by remembering, stopping to remember a few things. Firstly, who God is.

That's the big reason our first reading gave from Psalm 100. So in verse 4 in the middle there, it talks about giving thanks to God and praising Him twice, actually.

Then verse 5 gives the big reason. Verse 5, for or because of God's character. The Lord is good and His love endures forever.

His faithfulness continues through all generations. The Psalm says, here's a reason to praise God for who He is. His love, His goodness, His faithfulness.

[14 : 21] And that character of God does not change with our circumstances. It's consistent throughout every circumstance. He remains good.

He remains loving. He remains faithful. And so we have reason to give thanks no matter our circumstance for who God is.

Of course, His character is seen by how He acts towards us, like what He has already given us, which is the second reason we can give thanks even in bad circumstances.

For God has already given us quite a lot, both in terms of physical blessings and spiritual. In fact, the Psalmist talks about both in verse 3 at the top of the screen.

He begins by saying, it is He who made us, who created us as people. He gave us life. I mean, that's a lot, isn't it? How much is our life worth?

[15 : 22] Quite a bit. There's something to give thanks for. Indeed, as we heard a couple of weeks ago, God doesn't just create us and leave us. He continues to sustain us. As I said, He sustains our lungs so that the breath you just took is a gift from God and that one.

And so we have things we can thank God for. Then there's the other physical blessings like family and friends who care for us. Even a roof over our heads to shelter us from all the rain we've had.

Not to mention the fact that we live in Australia and not the Ukraine. Yes, we are to pray for them, but we're also to thank God for the peace we enjoy because it's a gift from Him.

Or the access to medical help we have. Our friends were missionaries in Indonesia for a number of years and they told us that just to have a Panadol, you would have to go to the hospital, wait for a long time and then purchase a Panadol at a high price, relatively speaking.

Panadol. I mean, where are they in your place? You've got them out in your medicine cabinet at home, don't you? We have such easy access to help like that and so we have even more reason to be thankful in this country, don't we?

[16 : 48] Even in bad circumstances. Our problem is we often envy what we don't have and forget what we do have, don't we? I mean, society teaches us to do that.

I mean, that's the whole point of advertising, isn't it? To tell you, you need this, so you go and buy this. And there's nothing wrong with buying more things, the problem comes when we fall into the trap of believing that we need this thing that we don't need or envying this thing that we don't have and forgetting the things we do have.

Or we're so familiar with what God has given us, we take it for granted or devalue it. As the old saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt.

Yeah. We're so familiar with it, we take it for granted or don't treat it rightly. We treat it with contempt. This was brought home to me afresh recently when I heard about a missionary who's serving in a place where they have to post lookouts outside their church in case the secret police come and put them in prison.

Imagine having to do that here at HDD. We don't, though, do we? We can meet freely. And so rather than lament our religious freedom that seems to be disappearing in our country, we can also give thanks that we still have it unlike so many others who don't.

[18 : 17] that's just the physical blessings. Then there's also the spiritual ones God's already given us. But again, Psalm 100 verse 3, not only did God make us, we are also his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

He's not just made us physically, he's also made us his people spiritually. And as we know from the New Testament, that came at great cost, the cost of his only son, Jesus.

Jesus who died the death that we deserve so that we could be brought into God's family with every spiritual blessing. My daughter was given a gift by some of her friends earlier this year when she was quite unwell.

And this gift came in this pink bag, very appropriate. And the gift had all sorts of goodies in it. It had some popcorn, two bags of popcorn actually.

And then it had some bars of chocolate, Cadbury's chocolate. I'm not going to fit all this on up here. And then it had a bag of lollies.

[19 : 26] It even had some Oreo biscuits. I won't drop them because they'll crack. And she was overwhelmed with thankfulness for all her friends gave her despite this bad situation. And yet the bag that God has given us is way bigger and it comes with spiritual blessings like forgiveness and adoption into his family.

I don't know if you can see that. And his spirit to help us in life along with assurance of life to come in a perfect world. And those things cost a whole lot more than popcorn and chocolate.

chocolate. And they last a whole lot longer too. In fact, I had to go and buy some more chocolate because it didn't last very long at all. All of my daughter's siblings ate it and some of her parents as well.

But the point is God has given us a lot already that we can still give him thanks for even in bad circumstances. In fact, Martin Rinkart was a pastor during the 30-year war in Europe in the German town of Eilenburg.

Before long, the town was inundated with refugees fleeing the conflict and they unwittingly brought the plague with them.

[20 : 47] Historians believe the deadliest period of the plague in Eilenburg was between 1636 and 37, that two-year period. Eventually, Martin was the only pastor left alive in the town and at one point he was conducting 50 funerals a day.

In 1637, over 4,000 in the year, including one for his wife. Yet in 1636, Martin wrote the hymn that we'll sing today, Now Thank We All Our God.

At the height of this misery, he was thanking God and leading his congregation to do the same. How could he possibly do that? Well, the hymn tells us.

It starts off by saying, Now Thank We All Our God with hearts and hands and voices and then it gives us one reason. He has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love that are still ours today.

even in the midst of this plague and 50 funerals a day. What gifts are still theirs even in this bad circumstance? Well, he goes on to list some in the next verse.

[22 : 00] That God is near us, that he still gives us joy and peace to cheer us, that he keeps us in his grace until heaven guides us in this life when we're perplexed.

Perplexed with the plague? I think perplexed is an understatement, isn't it? And to free us from all ills, and as one translation puts it, of this world in the next.

Martin, you see, remembered all that God had already given him, not just the physical blessings, but the spiritual ones as well, so that he could still give thanks even in this terrible circumstance.

man's. But we can actually go one step further. We can thank God not just for what he's given us despite our suffering, but for the way he grows us through our suffering.

Joni Erickson, Tata, is a lady that you probably have heard of. Here she is. She had a diving accident when she was a teenager, broke her neck, and became a quadriplegic.

[23 : 07] And this year in July is the 55th anniversary of being in a wheelchair. And it's come though with cancer, scoliosis, and pain, and yet she can still write this.

Decades of study and paralysis, pain, and cancer have taught me to say it was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Can you imagine that? She goes on to say, I won't rehearse all of suffering's benefits here. Many of you know them by heart, like the way God uses it to shape Christ's character in us, or how it produces patience, or how it refines our faith like gold, or gives us a livelier hope of heaven, and so on.

However, if I were to nail down suffering's main purpose, I'd say it's the textbook that teaches me who I really am. Suffering keeps knocking me off my pedestal of pride.

My displaced hip and scoliosis are sheep dogs that constantly snap at my heels, driving me down the road to Calvary, where I died to the sins that Jesus died for.

[24 : 18] In other words, her suffering teaches her to put off sin, including pride, that she can do this herself, and drives her to Christ. And for this she gives thanks. As she writes elsewhere, I've been thanking God for most of my paralyzed life.

Not only giving thanks in everything, our verse today, but giving thanks to God the Father for everything. Maybe this wheelchair felt like a horrible tragedy in the beginning, but I give God thanks in my wheelchair.

I'm grateful for my quadriplegia. Can you believe it? Why? Because it's a bruising of a blessing. It's a gift wrapped in black. It's the shadowy companion that walks with me daily, pulling and pushing me into the arms of my Saviour, and that's where the joy is.

The joy is not in suffering itself, but in how it pulls and pushes her to trust more in Christ and to grow more like Christ. And so even in suffering, we have something to give thanks for.

And the good news is, as we come to the end, the last part of the passage is God will help us. Have a look at verse 23 in your Bibles. verse 23. Paul prays, May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

[25 : 40] May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful. He will do it.

God's will for us is to be sanctified, which includes giving thanks in all circumstances. And the good news is, we're not alone in this. God is at work, sanctifying us through and through, keeping us for the day of the Lord Jesus.

And did you notice the absolute confidence we can have in verse 24? He who is faithful will do it. We're not alone in this.

And so we ought to give thanks in all circumstances. It's a command, it's God's will for us, it helps us not to sin, but shine, and we can give thanks in all circumstances for who God is, for what he's already given us, even for the suffering that grows us, and because he will help us.

And so, will you be a glass full of thanks kind of person? Let's pray we would be, let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for who you are, for all you've already given us, both physical and spiritual blessings, even for the way you're suffering to grow us, and for the way that you will help us to grow more like Christ in this life.

[27 : 16] And so, father, with that in mind, help us, we pray, to be a glass full of thanks kind of people, to give thanks in all circumstances, for this is your will for us in Christ Jesus.

We ask it in his name. Amen.