

THANKSGIVING 2019  
THE POWER OF A THANKFUL HEART  
I Thessalonians 5:16-18

*“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

~I Thessalonians 5:16-18

It is *not always easy* to give thanks, but this is the very thing that *we must do* in order to be *in the will of God* according to **I Thessalonians 5**...and to see *His will accomplished* in our lives. This is how we *mature* in our *faith*...this is how we *grow deep roots of faith*...*faith* for *ourselves*, for our *family*, for our *city*, and for our *nation*.

According to Scripture, a *thankful heart* expressing *thanksgiving* has *great power* to bring *joy*, and to *break the power* of the *enemy*. Whenever we *give thanks* to God, *despite*...or especially *in the midst* of...the *most difficult of circumstances*, the *enemy loses* a *big battle* in our lives. When we *give thanks* in the *midst of difficulty*, we *bring glory* to God because we are *expressing* His *presence* and *sovereignty*.

God longs for believers to *live* in a *realm of praise* and *thanksgiving*...a place where the *enemy* no longer has an ability to *hold us captive* or *manipulate* us. Satan is *defeated* when we have a *thankful heart* because *thankfulness* during *difficult situations* and *circumstances* is a *sacrifice* of *praise* and *worship* that is *pleasing to* God.

Are you *genuinely thankful*? Are you *thankful* for your *present situation* or *circumstances*? Are you *thankful* for your *salvation*, your *family*, your *friendships*, and your *job*? *Thankfulness* is a *key* to *living* the *victorious Christian life*. It is the *key* that *turns* your situation *around* because it *changes you*...it *changes* your *outlook*, and it *changes* your *attitude*. There is *power* in a *thankful heart*.

Unfortunately, to many believers *look like* they’ve been *sucking on lemons* than *expressing joy* and *thanksgiving*. How do *others in the world see us*...*see you*.

I. A THANKFUL HEART HAS CONTENTMENT:

A *thankful heart*...a *contented heart*...is a *heart* that’s at *peace*. *Begin to thank God* for *all the blessings* He *has given* you *instead* of *dwelling* on the *negative*. A *negative spirit* will lead to *worry*...*worry* leads to *discontentment*...*discontentment* will ultimately lead to *bitterness*...and this is a trail that will *dry up* the *soul*. Look at what **Elizabeth Elliott**, who *lost her husband* on the *mission field*, and *has faced multitudes* of *hardships* in her life...listen to what she has to say about *loving God*...and *knowing* that you are in the *will of God*...and about *being content*.

*“To love God is to love His will. It is to wait quietly for life to be measured by the One who knows us through and through. It is to be content with His timing and His wise apportionment. It is to follow in the steps of the Master, as did Paul, who was able to say that he had learned contentment no matter what the circumstances.”*

*“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly...for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am in...(because)...I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”*

~Philippians 4:10a, 11b, 13

Remember what his *circumstances* where when he wrote that? He was in *prison*. No easy lesson. He knew that the *sum of godliness plus contentment brings great gain*.

*“...Godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.”*

~I Timothy 6:6

Look at the example of Jesus. He *followed* the *will* of His Father to the *very end*. He *obeyed without complaint*... even when He *desired a different outcome*. Paul says in **Philippians 2** that we should have that *same attitude*.

*“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*

~Philippians 2:5-8

Jesus *emptied* Himself and *took on the form* and *very nature of man*. He *humbled* Himself and became *obedient* ...even to the *point of death*. We also are to have this *same attitude* with a *humble* and *thankful acceptance* of *God’s will* for our lives.

Again...Elizabeth Elliott...*“Jesus loved the will of His Father. He embraced the limitations, the necessities, the conditions, the very chains of His humanity as He walked and worked here on earth, all the while, fulfilling moment by moment His divine commission and the stern demands of His incarnation. Never was there a word or even a look of complaint.”*

Remember when **King Darius** *established a statute* in **Daniel 6** and stated that *anyone who made a petition to any god or man other than himself* for *thirty days* would be *cast into the lions’ den*. When **King Darius** had *signed* the document, **Daniel** *responded* by *going into his house* and *kneeling as always did, three times* a day, and *prayed* and *gave thanks* before God....

*“Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.”*

~Daniel 6:10

Notice **Daniel** went home to *pray*, and *gave thanks* to God as he *had always been doing*. In the midst of a *very trying situation*...even when *no answers were in sight*...**Daniel** still *gave thanks* to God in *prayer*!

Many of us...our *prayers* at such a moment would have consisted mainly of *requests* and *petitions* to the Lord ... **Daniel’s prayers** were *giving thanks*!

This was the *great secret* to **Daniel’s life** of *power* and *victory*! **Daniel** *didn’t wait for answers* to his prayers to *cry out* to God in *thanksgiving*. He *gave thanks* in *everything*.

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

~Philippians 4:6-7

What follows *prayer* with *thanksgiving*...*contentment* and *peace of mind*! A *peace* that *surpasses all comprehension*!

## II. A THANKFUL HEART HAS HOPE:

**Hope**...isn’t based on *wishful thinking* but *on the reality of God’s promises*...it’s a *confident anticipation*. Biblical **hope** isn’t *“for” something*...it’s *hope “in” someone*. Hope *in* Christ...what He *has done* for us and what He *has promised* He *will do*.

*“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

~Romans 15:13

*“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,”*

~Romans 12:10-12

We *cry out* in trials, we *get discouraged* in trials when we *don't understand*. But we *hold steady* in our *faith* knowing that God will *bring fruit* out of *pruning*...that something *good can/will come* from *trials*! That is our *steadfast hope*.

### III. A THANKFUL HEART EXPRESSES

**APPRECIATION:** *Expresses Gratitude*

It's *important* to *express* our *gratitude* and *appreciation*. A *thankful heart* involves *praising God*, *praising others*, and *sharing our gratefulness*.

Do you *let God know* how *thankful* you are for what He *has done* in your life? As a *believer*, *saved by grace*, we have *a lot* to be *thankful* for. No matter *how bad life seems to get*, we still *don't have room* to *complain*.

I think of the story that **Nik Ripken** shared about the man who had been in that *Russian jail* for *17 years*...and how *every morning* he would *stand at the bars in his cell* and begin to *sing that praise song*. *Every day* for *17 years*!

It's also *important* that we *verbally share* with others what we are *grateful* for. I know that it's kind of an expected tradition to *go around the table at thanksgiving* and *share what you are thankful for*...but to be honest...I'm not one who really *enjoys doing that*. But I've *learned* that it's *important*.

In addition to *expressing our thankfulness*...we need to *demonstrate* a life of *thankfulness*. That begins with a *heart of service*...a *heart of sacrifice*...and a *heart of sharing*. A *heart of service demonstrates appreciation, respect, and love*. *Sacrifice* requires us to *give something* (financial, time, etc.). *Sharing* what we have *with others*.

We all have so much to be *thankful* for.

### LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

David said in Psalm 116:17, *“To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the Lord.”* Each of us needs to *seek to have a thankful heart*...rising to a new level of *holiness* in our lives. Here are **3 ways to practice an attitude of thankfulness in everyday life**:

- **Thank and praise God for EVERYTHING in your life.** Thank Him for even the *difficulties*. It is a *sacrifice* to do this. But He can turn *troubles* to *triumph*.

*“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”*

~Hebrews 13:15

- **Don't allow yourself to COMPLAIN...about anything.** During the *difficult times*, be very careful to *watch your tongue*. Instead of *complaining*, think of ways you can *verbally* offer God the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*.
- **Don't compare yourself with OTHERS.** Don't wish that your *life was different*. God knows what is *best*. The Bible says *having a thankful heart* is *God's will* for you in Christ Jesus. When we begin to *thank God* for *what we have* rather than *comparing ourselves with others*, it opens the door for God's *blessings*.

God is *pleased* when we *praise* and *thank* Him *continually*. Even here on earth...few things *feel better* than when we *receive heartfelt praise* and *appreciation* from someone else (*genuine praise...not flattery*). An amazing thing happens when we *offer praise* and *thanksgiving* to God. When we *give God praise* and *ascribe to Him glory...our own hearts* are filled with *joy*.