

Daily Devotional, November 25, 2020 Give Thanks Always

¹⁶ **“Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

I just received a card that simply said “Thank you” for a recent event that I had participated in. It was nice to feel appreciated. Not only did the card make me feel valued, but it reminded me of my need to express my gratitude to the people in my life who I appreciate.

The Apostle Paul wrote the two letters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians to a young church that he started with some of his fellow travelers. Their time in Thessalonica was successful in that they were able to share the good news of Jesus and several people were converted to the Christian faith. However, their time was cut short when they were forced to leave town after they stirred up trouble with the local authorities. Paul was disturbed that their presence in this community was not well received, and even more concerned that he had so little time to spend with the young Christians that had come to faith under him. This is the backdrop of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul could have spent his time worrying and complaining about his treatment and harassment in Thessalonica, but he chose to focus on gratitude. In the conclusion of this letter, Paul encourages the young followers of Christ to, “Give thanks in all circumstances.” Paul was not teaching that we should thank God *for* everything that happens to us, but *in* everything. Bad things do not come from God, so we should not thank God for them. But when evil strikes, we can still be thankful for God’s presence and for the good that God will accomplish through the distress.

There is no doubt that we all have circumstances in our lives that would justify our having a bad attitude and some complaining. The example that the Apostle Paul gives us is to choose gratitude. Our lives are filled with people and things which are worthy of our gratitude. It is so easy to let our eyes and mind focus on the things that are not going our way. The intentional expression of our gratitude allows us to shift our focus away from the bad, and toward the things that are good and worthy of our attention.

When was the last time you wrote a note to someone to express your gratitude? When was the last time you called someone just to say thank you? This week the celebration of Thanksgiving gives us pause to reflect on family: our immediate family, family members who we are distanced from, and those who are members of our family of faith. Taking time to share our appreciation of these many family members is one of the kindest things we can do.

Today, I am going to take a moment to intentionally give thanks to some people in my life. I hope that you will take some time and say, “Thank you” to those who are meaningful in yours. Maybe it will be your first time to write a thank you card or call someone just to thank them, but I promise it will make a positive difference in your life and the life of the person who received your gratitude.

May God bless you. I am thankful for every one of you. Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

Prayer: God of Love, I thank You for the people in my life who are easy to love. I thank You for my family and friends who understand my actions, who support me in my decisions, and whose presence can lift the burden of a difficult day. Help me with those who are difficult to love, those who harshly criticize and hold unreasonable expectations, those who snub me or try to bend me to their will, help me to recognize their flaws and their dangers. But then let me remember your attitude of love toward them and lead me to see them in the light of Your love. In the name of the One who is true love, Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.