

# Thankful

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. I have a lot to be thankful for, and I could stand up here and share that today.

And I thought about that, but it sounds mighty me-centered, and so I'll be quick about it. As a point of testimony, I want to say I'm thankful for my salvation, for without it, I'd be eternally lost. I want to thank God for my raising, my family.

My parents were always committed to the Lord, my life, throughout my life they have been, and always had me in church, and I'm thankful for that. It wasn't a choice.

I'm thankful for my marriage. God's blessed us, and I'm thankful for my children. He's blessed us.

I'm thankful for this church and my calling that God's placed upon my life.

I'm thankful for my health. As far as I know, I'm doing all right. And I'm thankful that every morning I wake up, the Lord's ready and waiting to spend time with me.

[ 1 : 17 ] And I'm thankful for that time. I want to focus instead not on what I'm thankful for, but what we ought to be thankful for.

Possibly some things that we don't automatically think of, because what I've just said would be on the tip of your tongue if we were having a testimony time in this service probably.

Many of those same things that you could thank God for. I think we ought to always be thankful, and while we're thankful, we ought to also inform our face that we're thankful.

I think we ought to radiate thankfulness for what God has given to us and act like it. 1

Thessalonians tells us that we ought to ooze with thanksgiving.

I mean, be serious about it. Paul's letters are great. They're inspired. They're doctrinal. They're instructional. But I like the end of them the best.

[ 2 : 20 ] Because the Apostle Paul has a way of ending most of his letters with short bullet points that hit to the core of how we ought to live.

It don't take a lot of explanation to understand what he's saying. That's good news for you this morning, by the way. But it hits right where we live. It is good, practical stuff, and I want to look at some today.

It's in 1 Thessalonians 5, beginning in verse 16. He said, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

It's interesting, that phrase, rejoice always, is the shortest verse in the New Testament. Now, somebody quick is going to say, no, Jesus wept. Well, I was speaking of the Greek.

The original Greek, that is the shortest verse in all the New Testament. Yet it is one of the most powerful verses in the New Testament. Rejoice always.

[ 3 : 31 ] Literally, to enjoy your state of well-being at all times. Romans 14, 17 says, The kingdom of God is about, among many other things, having joy in the Holy Spirit.

And I want you to notice that Paul's not saying, when he says rejoice always, he's not saying, look like you're rejoicing. He's not saying, act like you're rejoicing. He's saying, rejoice.

Be rejoicing. And I'm not talking about church joy, okay? You know what church joy is, don't you?

You know? I mean, rough ride to church, and then you get out smiling, you know?

Have a hard time brushing the kid's hair for hitting them in the head with it. And I'm not advocating that by any means, but you know, there's mornings like that. And then everybody gets in the car, nobody speaks to anybody, and then you get to church, and everything's perfect, you know?

We're wonderful, you know? That's that church joy. I'll tell you how you do it. You get up really early, and you drive to church alone. That's how I do it, you know?

[ 4 : 42 ] It works, but no, this speaks of real joy. I mean, this speaks of not based on our circumstances, because circumstances are going to change.

You're going to have good days, you're going to have bad days, it's going to be up and down. And your joy in the Lord, and your rejoicing in the Lord, should not be based upon those things. It can't be.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. That means it's a spiritually natural budding that bears fruit in the lives of those who truly walk with God. It's not godly to be grumpy.

It's not. Even to those who live with you. And over and over again in Scripture, you'll see the imperative, and it's a command.

Rejoice. Rejoice. And if you are rejoicing, inform your faith, you know? Rejoice.

[ 5 : 46 ] Rejoice. Verse 17 says, pray without ceasing. Now, that does not mean to pray without any interruption, really.

I mean, you know? And it does not mean to go home and get on your knees and never come back up. That's not what it's saying at all. It's actually a word that would be used when they talk about somebody who has a hacking cough.

You know, he just won't stop coughing. Well, that's the kind of terminology, or like a hiccup, you know?

That it's irritating you. Well, how do you think the fellow who's hiccuping feels, you know? I mean, how about him? And it just keeps coming. It just won't stop.

That's what he's talking about. Don't stop praying. Don't give up. Let prayer be on the tip of your tongue. Are you consistently praying about matters?

[ 6 : 44 ] If not, realize that and then get after it and pray without ceasing. When do I stop praying about this? Don't.

Don't stop praying about it. And sometimes it is our natural tendency to try to take care of matters, to do what we need to do, and to make sure that we're doing all we can do.

And if we're not careful, we'll get so much into that mode, especially when we're in emergency mode there, that we'll fail to pray through those things.

And I'm just telling you, we need to bring God in on those things. He's already there. He don't need the informing, okay? If you don't get the diagnosis right in the prayer, it's okay.

God can handle it, okay? But you need, and I need, to surrender the matters that's in our lives to him and realize we ain't toting this alone.

[ 7 : 52 ] As a matter of fact, he'll tote it for us if we just give it to him. And we, how often do you, you just keep doing it. You just keep doing it.

Pray without ceasing. And then he says, we ought to be thankful in all circumstances. Even when things don't go well, we ought to be thankful. Romans 8, 26 through 28 says this, likewise, the spirit helps us in our weakness.

For we don't know what to pray for as we ought, but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose. What I mean by that is God is up to something bigger than we can see, always.

And so even in the midst of our circumstances, we're thankful. God's already there. And so we give thanks. Thankful for what then? I mean, what are we thankful for?

[ 9 : 07 ] Let me give you some perspective. One, I think you ought to be thankful for the church. I really do. Colossians 3, 15 through 17 says this, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, man, this is a key passage. Whatever you do, it'll change what you do, by the way. But in whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Folks, to me, that's what church is about. Let the word of God be first and foremost. Let's speak and teach one another the word of God. Let's chat about the word of God.

Let's discuss the word of God. Let's understand the word of God. Let's pine together for the word of God. Let's seek out the word of God. Even let that flow into song.

[ 10 : 21 ] And that means that when the congregation sings, we sing, you know? As I study the word, I often break into song. Just an overflow of thankfulness.

And that's what the church is about. We need to be thankful for it and we need to be dedicated to it. Faithfulness to congregated worship is less a priority today than it used to be for Christians.

And we suffer because of it. Baptist Press put out an article just a couple of weeks ago that said churches are now, the churches that were surveyed, 100% of them are now having worship in person.

But they're finding that attendance is lagging since COVID. It seems to me that the same numbers of people are coming.

I know of exceptions there, but for the most part, the same numbers of people are coming. But the consistency is not what it needs to be. It is common today for good Christians to go to church if nothing else is going on.

[ 11 : 40 ] If we got anything booked on Sunday, then we're liable to go to church. When it's better to prioritize what's going on and remain faithful to church, I encourage you to make this your policy.

Miss for the extraordinary, but don't just miss for the ordinary. I mean, there's good things that come. I get it, you know. I get it. Miss for the extraordinary, but if we're not careful, and when you do miss, then get yourself right back the following week because the devil has a heyday with uncommitted, compromised Christians that are not circulating in the body of Christ on a regular basis and quite honestly, usually are not making a whole lot of difference for Christ.

Don't misunderstand me. Church attendance does not make you a Christian. That's why I will probably close this message out like I do just about every other message by saying, if you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm thankful today that he will save you and change you and you need to surrender your life and give your life to Christ.

And you don't get that simply by attending church. That don't come that way. It comes through a life commitment, not just committing to attendance. Church attendance does not make you a Christian, but if you're a Christian, you'll want to be in church.

It's evidence because remember what Colossians told us, do everything in his name. Everything. And when your life is circulating around everything being in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God in everything that I face, then it's going to naturally adhere you to the body of Christ and to the people of God.

[ 13 : 31 ] Be thankful for the church. The second thing is be thankful for the opportunity to give. God's been good to us this year and he is faithful.

Even in hard times, even when gas goes to nearly \$5 and all that stuff, God's still faithful. So let's make sure we are. May we be faithful through the end of the year and into the next and give faithfully.

However, when I say that, that's not really the giving that I'm speaking of. I instead speak of giving your gifts, giving your abilities that God has gifted you with, that God has granted you with, giving those back to God, those individual treasures that we contribute to the church and help us become a better, more productive, more winsome people.

Don't shelve what God has given you to give. Don't hoard that up. Don't bury that. Use that for his glory. I'm thankful that we began worship today with children giving their gifts to the Lord and leading us in worship.

How wonderful that is for instrumentalists and for the choir and for the band and for the orchestra and for the solo. Giving what they have to the Lord.

[ 15 : 02 ] When you come tonight, did you get that? When you come? When you do, you'll see a room that is decorated and ready to go.

We've got special things on the table that we want to take care of tonight. We've got a photo booth set up. All that stuff didn't come just out of nowhere. And it all wasn't set up by the staff of this church.

It was people living out, using their gifts, working in God's family and strengthening the church through that.

And you don't know what a blessing that is for a pastor. To know when those things are taken care of. There was something that I was going to add. And somebody saw me with them and said, just don't worry about it.

I'm coming early. I'll take care of that. That's using what God has given you for the kingdom of God. That's what it's about, folks.

[16:02] And that's when you start getting Tuesday morning when our men met at 6 o'clock and at 9 o'clock. Men, it's not too late to get involved in that. And we are meeting this week, by the way. So, but we're reading through a book and it's 10 questions to diagnose your spiritual health.

And this week's question was, do you delight in the bride of Christ? Do you delight in the church of Jesus Christ?

Do you find contentment there? And we talked about how important it is to take a step deeper into the body of Christ and really absorb yourself in the life of this church because I say it often and I'm not taking anything away from the hour that we have together, but I'm just telling you, it gets a whole lot better than this.

The more you invest your lives with the people of this church, the more you'll be blessed, honestly. I'm thankful for that and it gives us an opportunity to not bury or hoard what God has given to us, but to use it for His glory.

And if you're a guest here and God is leading you to be a part of this church, let's talk about that. I'm more than available. My phone number's on the front of the bulletin. You can contact me anytime. If I'm sleeping, I won't answer, but you can contact me, you know.

[17:32] But be careful, especially in the meantime, be careful not to be noncommittal because before long, you won't be committed. It's a strategy that the evil one loves to somehow get people between church and then, and if they're in between too long, that church really becomes no church.

So just do as God leads and follow His lead and be thankful for the opportunity to give, but also be thankful for the opportunity to receive because I love how it works two ways in the body of Christ. We are all to serve the Lord and we're all to be served by God's people. That's the, that's the, that's the sweet spirit of, there's a mutuality in the church that's pretty special.

We all have gifts to give and we all are to be given to. We all serve and we're all to be served and things get out of order when it's all giving and not receiving. People get wore out and if it's all receiving and not giving, that's not healthy either.

Both extremes are disruptive. So we do both. We give and we receive and I am thankful for that. I love to hear people talk about how their church came through when they needed them to come through in whatever way they needed to do that.

[18:57] And I want to do all I can for people to be able to rely upon me because I deeply rely upon you. And it's a great opportunity tonight to just reciprocate that love to each other and our time together.

And we take the Lord's Supper around the table. It builds a bond. It's biblical. Breaking bread together is how the New Testament church did it. So if you have trouble with how many fellowships we have, just look at the New Testament, okay?

Acts was eaten every day together. I'm not going there, okay? But I'm just telling you, it's biblical. So let's be thankful to be a part of it and be faithful to be a part of it.

Be thankful for the opportunity to receive. Also, be thankful for the opportunity to check. And I want you to hear me. When we come together, it's a checkup time.

It's a time for us to check our gauges in life of sorts. Check your heart. You want to know how to check your heart? Hebrews 4.12 says this, You know what that means?

[20:20] That means the Word of God gets to the heart of the matter. And it can get uncomfortable at times. But it gets to the heart of the matter. Because by the Holy Spirit of God, the Word of God is personal.

But we need it. So we check our heart. Second thing we do is we check our direction. We check our direction. When I hike, I have a GPS app on my phone that tells us the inclines, the distance, the landmarks, and I'm the navigator of the bunch, you know?

So when we slow down, I'll go, look, we ain't but halfway there. You got to keep going, you know? It gives us the guidance each step of the way. And I can spoil a trip or a hike by overplanning.

That's just the way I am, you know? The Word of God is what guides us on the path of life. A passage that has marked my life and probably yours too, if you've rested in the Word of God, is Proverbs 3, 5, and 6.

Trust in the Lord. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him. And He will make your path straight. He'll direct your paths. He'll smooth bumps.

[ 21 : 45 ] Psalm 119, 105 says, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I don't know if you've noticed, but we live in an ever-increasing dark world.

And if we're not guided by the Word of God, and if we don't stick to the Word of God, we will wonder in darkness when we need to be walking in the light.

So we check our direction. The other thing we do is we check our focus. What's our focus in life? Check our focus. Hebrews 12, 1 and 2 says this, Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so easily, and let us run with endurance that race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

There are a lot of places to put your eyes today, so check your focus. Where's your focus at? They need to be focused on the Lord. Don't look back and live in the past.

Because the devil loves to rip up and bring back the past. And if you're a child of God and you've asked for forgiveness for your sins, those things are gone.

[ 22 : 54 ] The slate is clean. The past is forgiven. It's under the blood. It's gone. Don't look back. Don't look around. This world's a mess.

I promise you. It's a mess. So don't get caught up in it. Look ahead to the one who started us on this journey and the one who will perfect us and the one who will lead us to that goal.

Be thankful for the opportunity to check our lives by the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And we're thankful by making sure that we do put a check on where our mind is, on where our heart is, on what our direction is in life and what our focus is in life.

And then be thankful for the fellowship. I love the Church of Jesus Christ. Greatest thing my parents ever did for me was to share Christ with me and take me to church every week.

Every week. Whether I felt like it or not, whether I wanted to or not. It did not take the whole family to stay home with somebody and wipe their nose. That didn't happen. My brother got sick.

[ 24 : 05 ] He stayed home. We all went, you know. I mean, that's the way somebody would stay with him, I guess. I don't remember that. But anyway, they didn't stay with me. There was not a break.

There was consistency. There was dedication. And I don't believe it was legalism. Because I ain't much on legalism. Because Jesus tears legalism down so much.

It's based on love. Love for the body of Christ. And that means love for the church in the glory days when things are wonderful. And love for the church when things are slow.

And things are not so great. The fellowship is fabulous. The first church I pastored was a graying church. I think I was the first half-time or part-time pastor they had ever had.

They had been through it. They had split twice in 10 years. And the people that were left wasn't too happy about it. They were bruised and beaten and old and wore out.

[ 25 : 06 ] And I'd walk through that nursery area and there wouldn't be a kid inside. Didn't even cut the lights on for Sunday school. I'd pray over that parking lot. Little as much as God is in it.

God make it much, you know. But it was great fellowship. There was nobody there my age.

Nobody. So, I started dating Dom, brought her in, you know.

So, second church I pastored, we had babies together. Well, about the same time. Not together, but about the same time.

We raised families together. Built bonds together. In my third church, I watched young families grow and I buried some of my heroes.

And we did great things for the Lord together. And if you, in my new church, knew how excited I was about what God has in store for us, oh my, you'd get excited too.

[ 26 : 15 ] Because I believe that God's got his hand in it. And I believe you ought to believe that too. And I believe it ought to show in what we do and how we do it.

Lastly, I think we ought to be thankful that this is not all there is. Because when you give your life to Christ, he takes control.

And he gives you life, and as Jesus put it, life more abundantly. That's not just a quantity of life forever, it's a quality of life.

It's an uptick that happens when we give our heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit indwells us, and we build a bond and begin building a stronger bond with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then one day, we get to see him face to face. 1 Corinthians 15, 19 says this, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[ 27 : 25 ] But I am thankful, folks. This is not all there is. There's more. And for that, I'm thankful. There's coming a day When no heartache shall come No more clouds in the sky No more tears to dim the eye All is peace forevermore On that happy golden shore What a day, glorious day That will be Do you know it?

Sing it. What a day That will be When my Jesus I shall see And I look Upon his face The one who saved Me by his grace When he takes Me by the hand And leads me Through The promised land What a day Glorious day That will be Amen Every head bowed And every eye closed If you don't know The Lord Jesus today I got news for you Today is the day of salvation He'll save you He'll change you And you can know Not only where you'll Spend eternity But you can know That right now He gives you the power And the strength That you need To live for him It's the best thing

Going folks It's the greatest opportunity We have in this life And if you've never Given your heart and life To the Lord Jesus Christ We're going to stand And we're going to sing In just a moment And I want you to come down And tell me that I'd love to have you guided Through what it means To give your heart and life To Christ Maybe you're here And you have done that But God's drawing you Into this fellowship And you know that I encourage you to come Let nothing hinder you In God's timing For you to just Simply be obedient Maybe you're here And you have received Christ But you've never Publicly acknowledged that You've never been Baptized as a believer You need to make That right today You need to show Your thankfulness By getting those things Right with God Maybe you just need To get your heart Right with God There's just matters In your life That you've tried To take care of yourself And you ain't Turned it over to Him And in order to live A thankful life We give it all to Him And then we thank God For it Whether that's Whether you deal With that where you are Or whether you deal

With this altar Or whether you want The pastor to pray with you It makes little difference To me as long as you do What God tells you to do Just be obedient You'll never be satisfied Until you're obedient To the Lord Don't ever do more Than He asks you And never do less Just simply follow As He leads Lord Jesus Lead us Lord We're thankful today For the power Of Your presence For how You worked And moved in our life God lead us Right now To simply be obedient To You Father In Jesus precious name Amen Amen