

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Thanksgiving in the Midst of Adversity

KEY PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Deuteronomy 31:6 | Matthew 27:46
Romans 8:28 | Ephesians 5:20 | Philippians 4:6-7

SUMMARY

Gratitude comes easily when everything is going our way, but 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks.”

This includes both good and hard times. But when we don't understand why God allows us to go through suffering and trials, we may let our situation extinguish a grateful spirit. Instead of rejoicing and praising God for who He is and what He's done for us, we focus on our pain and confusion and begin to doubt the Lord and His Word. However, when we choose to be thankful in every situation, despite our feelings, we'll reap many benefits.

SERMON POINTS

There are two prominent passages that speak about gratitude in the believer's life.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, “In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” The Lord desires that we have a grateful spirit no matter what our circumstances. Even in the midst of pain or hardship, we can always thank Him for our salvation, His presence, and His work in our lives.
- **Ephesians 5:20**, “Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” Although we are told to thank the Lord “for all things,” this never includes anything that is contrary to God's nature or His commands. However, we can thank Him for whatever He allows in our lives that is according to His sovereign will, knowing that He promises to work everything for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). We won't always see the good

immediately or even during our lifetime, but in heaven, it will all make sense. Until then, gratitude demonstrates our trust in the Lord.

Why should we be grateful to God in everything?

- **It keeps us continually aware that we are walking in His presence, which contributes to a godly life.** As believers, we will never walk alone because the Holy Spirit lives within us. Gratitude reminds us of His presence and motivates us to respond in a godly manner by seeking to view our pain and trouble from His perspective, perceive how He is working through the situation, and rely upon His promises. No matter what happens throughout the day, we can thank Him, knowing that our all-loving, omnipotent, and omniscient God is helping us walk through it.
- **Gratitude motivates us to look for the Lord's purpose in everything that happens.** Unexpected trials or suffering may cause us to question God or feel as though He's forgotten us, but He has promised to bring good from even our worst experiences (v. 28). Whether we understand or not, we can rely on His trustworthiness and thank Him for the good He's promised to produce in our lives according to His will.
- **Being grateful brings us into submission to God's will when we're suffering pain and heartache.** In the midst of emotional or physical pain, we may not feel grateful to God, but that's when we should start to express it verbally. As we keep thanking Him, eventually our feelings will begin to match our words. God knows the weakness of human emotions and understands that our thanks may just be words in

the beginning, but He honors our obedience in choosing to express gratitude.

- **Being thankful reminds us of our continual dependence upon the Lord.** He despises a spirit of independence that denies our need of Him, exalts self-sufficiency, and leads to ingratitude. In reality, we are all dependent upon Him for every breath we take, but may not realize it until we face a situation that we are powerless to overcome or change. Adversity shows us our weakness and drives us to the Lord. A mature believer lives in absolute dependence upon God every day and rejoices in his heart with a grateful and trusting spirit.
- **Gratitude helps us trust the Lord when we don't understand why.** Although God hasn't promised to explain why we go through pain or hardship, He has promised to be with us and enable us to face it. Thanksgiving reminds us that we don't have to understand the situation; we just have to be obedient in the process.
- **Thanksgiving is essential for rejoicing in the midst of our suffering.** There's no way we can "rejoice always" without giving thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). Although the pain may be so penetrating that we cannot feel joy at the moment, we can choose to express gratitude with our lips until it becomes a reality in our hearts. God hears and understands the depth of our agony just as He understood Jesus' pain when He cried out, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matt. 27:46).
- **Gratitude to God in difficult times gives our witness a greater impact.** Our painful experiences and grateful response allow us to help those who are hurting in the same way. By sharing our struggles with others who don't understand what God is doing, our witness for Christ becomes more powerful.
- **Thankfulness displaces anxiety with peace.** The Greek word for peace, *eirene*, means to bind together. When we keep thanking the Lord in the midst of sorrow, loss, and heartache, we are bound to Him, and His peace fills us as our anxieties crumble. The pain and difficulty may remain, but

we've changed inside. This kind of peace is only available to those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Although anxiety may suddenly come upon us at the moment, we don't have to stay in that state. If we keep praying and giving thanks to God, His peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

- **Thanksgiving focuses our attention on God rather than our circumstances.** If we fix our eyes on the difficulty, the pain becomes unbearable, peace eludes us, and the situation seems hopeless. But thanksgiving shifts our focus to the Lord and reminds us of what we can know for certain:
 - **We're not alone.**
 - **God is with us.**
 - **He loves us.**
 - **We're eternally secure.**
 - **The Lord walks with us.**
 - **He will bring us through.**
 - **God will turn this experience into something profitable in our lives.**
- **Gratitude energizes us physically, emotionally, and spiritually in difficult times.** Pain, trouble, and disappointment drain us, but trusting God, focusing on Him, and thanking Him revitalize us. It's His presence within us that renews us physically, spiritually, and emotionally so we can keep going.

RESPONSE

- When adversity or suffering comes into your life, do you tend to judge God by the circumstance or judge the situation by what Scripture has said about Him? How would each perspective affect your gratitude and your ability to trust the Lord?
- How would a life of consistent gratitude to God equip you for the most difficult moments you might encounter?

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