

# In Everything Give Thanks

by Paul Washer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of thankfulness as a habitual gratitude that flows from us, and how it is a demonstration of faith in God's sovereignty.*

**Duration:** 40:34

**Topics:** "Thanksgiving"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being thankful to God. He highlights how often we focus on what we lack or what we are not, instead of recognizing the miracles and blessings in our lives. The preacher encourages the audience to look at the cross and the resurrection of Christ as a reminder of what God has done for them. He also points out that a lack of thankfulness is a characteristic of the unbelieving world and a sign of a mind hostile to God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that even in the midst of conflicts and challenges, God is working for our good.

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## Transcript

Let's open up our Bibles again to 1 Thessalonians. And we will, well, whether we bring the book to a close or not tonight, this will be the last Wednesday night in this book. So, we'll try to get on as far as we can.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5, let's begin with verse 16. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and everything gives thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from every form of evil.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. Brethren, pray for us.

Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Alright, let's look, starting off in something that I've said over and over, but I want you to see this, because it's very, very important. There is, how do we ourselves grow into the image of Christ, on one hand, and at the same time, how can we be a blessing to the body of Christ? And these two things, of course, are not mutually exclusive. You don't have to choose one over the other.

The idea presented here, and in many passages throughout the New Testament, is that the more you're sanctified, the more you are becoming like Christ, the more helpful you will be to the body of Christ. And we can say that in any situation. My wife's greatest need is a husband that's more like Christ.

My children's greatest need, my friend's greatest need from me, is that I be more like Jesus. So, in our growing to conformity to Christ, vertically we could say, going toward Him, horizontally, we are a greater and greater blessing to others. Another example of this would be in the Beatitudes, in Matthew chapter 5, where what's happening there, he talks about being salt and light.

And it's a shame that those two admonitions are often disconnected from the Beatitudes. What he's teaching is the greatest way we can become salt and light to the world is by reflecting the Beatitudes in our life, being of poor spirit, being those who are broken over sin, those who are merciful, those who are seeking first the kingdom, those who have pure hearts. That's how we change those around us.

We live in a society today in which we are full of militancy, activism, and other things. Whenever Christians get together and think about changing the world, let's do something. There's nothing wrong with that, but maybe we should start off with, let's be something.

And in being something, more like Christ, we may be more inclined to be doing His will instead of some strange idea we have about how to advance the kingdom in the flesh. So, now, we've looked at rejoice always, we've looked at prayer, praying without ceasing. Now, in verse 18, In everything give thanks.

Brothers, I know because I struggle with this in myself. Sometimes I'm caught up in all the things that are going on in the mission, in the world, emails, problems, this, that, and I walk around like someone detached from life, sometimes in my own fog, and sometimes manifesting the very opposite of what we see here. And I've come to realize more and more that when I do that, I bring those around me down.

It's not an encouragement, do you see? It's not being helpful to everyone by being some sort of continual martyr smoldering on the altar of sacrifice. But one of the best ways that I can encourage the people in Christ and the people around me are to rejoice always, is one of them. To be praying always and in everything to give thanks.

To be a person who is extremely, extremely thankful. Not as my wife often times refers to me as Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. That's not going to help anyone.

Now when I talk this way, I'm not talking about you being optimistic. I'm not talking about a Norman Vincent Peale optimism or positive thinking. Not at all.

What I'm talking about is standing upon who God is, what He has done, who we are in Him, and future grace. What's going to happen in the future. That's how we maintain this attitude of rejoicing, of confident praying, and finally being thankful for all things.

Now, if we look at our text, it says, in everything give thanks. First of all, the idea here, the word means yes to give thanks, but it's the idea of a habitual gratitude that is flowing from us. It's a present tense verb indicating a continuous action.

That the mark of the Christian life is to be rejoicing, yes, even in the midst of trial. The mark of the Christian life is to be praying, even in the darkest moment, especially the darkest moment. And finally, another mark of the Christian life is to be a thankful person.

And that type of attitude really does have some tremendous and positive effects in our life. Do you know, a thankful person is much less prone to being a critical person. A person who is always looking at the other person as an object of grace, as someone in whom God is working, as a blessing.

When you have that kind of attitude toward other people, you're much more prone to give thanks to God for those people than to complain about them. Now, I'll admit, there are some people that give us a lot of reason for complaint, and little reason for thankfulness. But then you've got to realize this, the person that you know who is the greatest source of you being thankful is only that way because of the grace of God.

It's only that way because of the grace of God. Every time I am ready to execute a person, every time I am ready to criticize a person, every time I am ready to grumble and murmur against a person, all I have to do is look in the mirror. That's it.

In the mirror of God's Word. I will sometimes blow my top, I will sometimes get so put out with certain people, but then, if I can get quiet enough, long enough to be in the Word, everything settles back down. Why? Because I realize, if God treats me like I treat them, I go to hell.

Do you see that? We are all needy. And we all have a tendency to be so blind with regard to our own failure. And we seem to be so insightful and have such a piercing vision when it comes to the failures of others.

And this leads to a heart that cannot be thankful. Also, another thing that I want to say about thankfulness or the lack thereof is this. The idolatry, idolatry, because that's what it is, of unmet expectations, whether it be from others or it be from God.

Why are we not thankful? Because we have certain expectations from others, even from God. And when they don't meet those expectations, we are put out. We grumble.

We want things to go our way. And if they don't go our way, it's very hard to be thankful. And what is that? Nothing less than idolatry.

Do you see that? Do you see that? Also, it is a demonstration of immaturity in that we are not reflecting God's treatment of us in our treatment of others. I am, as you are, as anyone who is even growing a little bit in maturity, you realize that you're upheld by God, that your salvation is a work of grace. But you also realize that if you were stripped of that grace, if you were stripped of God's mercy, there would be nothing for you.

Nothing. You and I deserve nothing. And yet, we've been given everything.

The only problem is, we haven't been given it the way we sometimes expect, and we haven't been given it at the time that we, in our own heart of hearts, are demanding. Do you see that? And it shows self-idolatry, a lack of faith in God, and just a really, really pathetic attitude. There's nothing worse than a whiny child that can't be pleased, than a grumbling person who can be thankful for nothing, than the critical eye that all it can do is kill and eat and devour.

But we are called, yea, we are commanded here to do what? To be thankful. To be thankful for everything in our life. Now, I want us to look at a few things.

I want to read a few quotes from Hebert, and then from two exegetes by the name of Hogg and Vine, lexicologists. Hebert says, The Christian should meet every adverse circumstance of life, not with a spirit of stoic resignation, but with a spirit of unfailing gratitude. Now, there is a great difference between the mature Christian who is joyful and the stoic.

Do you know what a stoic is? Stoic is a type, actually, it's a person who follows a certain philosophy. That no matter what happens to them in their life, they will clench their teeth, they will bear it, and they will not complain. No matter what it is.

It is actually a philosophy that one time was very popular and very admired. And there are some qualities in it that are worthy of admiration. But the Christian isn't someone that just says, Okay, whatever comes, I lose it all, there is no hope, but I will maintain a firm chin and I will bear through it.

That is not what God is commanding us to do. Rather, God is commanding us to actually be thankful for what is happening. Because we know that even if it's dark, even if it's painful, even if it hurts so much, our body screams.

We know that somehow He is in control and He is going to take it and He is going to use it to do something absolutely marvelous in our life and eventually, even if it be waiting until eternity, we will see the fruit of it. We are thankful, not because we are disciplined. We are thankful in the worst situations, not because we are strong and not because we are filled with some crucial willpower.

We are thankful, and this is going to be hard for you to believe, we are thankful because we believe. And the weakest person can believe if they have a high view of God. Do you see that? The weakest person who is afraid of his own shadow, who is afraid to look around the corner because adversity might be coming, who is an eeyore that sees danger in everything.

If he sees a daisy pop up, he is afraid to smell it because surely there is going to be a bee that is going to sting him. Even that weak person can rejoice in adversity if he believes who God is and what God has promised. Be strong.

You see that? Sometimes I am so worried that when we talk about these types of virtue in the middle of trials, people will get the idea that we are talking about some sort of John Wayne willpower. No. We are talking about faith.

How can you stand in the middle of this hell because I believe that God is sovereign even over this and He has a purpose in it to conform me to His image and not just conformity to image, but that it will result for me in an extra weight of glory in eternity. You see. Now, Hebert also says, it is typical of a life of unbelief that it lacks thanksgiving.

Go to Romans for just a second. Chapter 1. Keep your place. Just be there for a second.

But in Romans chapter 1, it is the darkest, most complete picture of an unbelieving, reprobate, perverse, wicked world. And look what it says in 21. Where does it all start? Where do all these crimes of Romans 1, some of them are so sinful that they should not even be mentioned at times in mixed company or in public.

Some of these things are horrific. They are at the very bottom of the barrel of the crimes against God. But where do they start? What is the really big sin here? Look in verse 21.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks. So what is one of the greatest characteristics of the unbelieving, twisted, depraved world? A lack of thankfulness. A lack of thankfulness.

And one of the reasons, it is not just spiritual death, but it is a mind that is totally contrary, totally hostile to God, the will of God, the purposes of God. Now, Hogg and Vine say this, and I think it is very interesting. He who can say amen to the will of God in his heart will be able to say hallelujah also.

Now I know that kind of smacks at first of a bit of super spirituality, but it is not. This is a sound group of men here. What he is trying to say is that if we truly have the right view of God, and we truly have a right view of what God is doing in everything, then it will not just produce in us a stoic amen.

I will bear it. But hallelujah, behind this dark and frowning providence is something absolutely wonderful that could not be attained unless I pass through this dark providence. There is something on the other side, something that is going to happen.

Because even Scripture notes that when we are passing through, it is not necessarily fun. It can hurt like hell. It is not fun.

But yet at the same time, we can rejoice and we can be thankful because we know at the other end, and even while we are passing through, He is doing something to us. And never forget, He knows exactly what you need to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. He knows exactly what you must go through.

You don't. I don't. No man does.

He does. He knows. You see a fine Christian suffering the loss of so many things.

You see a fine Christian who has only wanted in life certain things, and yet all those things that they desired seems to have been taken from them. To hold something precious in their hand and then have it snatched away it seems. You say, why? Why? Because He knows.

He knows what you must pass through to make it to glory with an extra weight of glory. Never forget that. Now, I want us to look at some similar injunctions.

Go to Ephesians 5.18-20. Ephesians 5.18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father. Do you see that in verse 20? Always giving thanks. Always giving thanks in the name.

If you are outside of the context of God, if you are outside of the context of His name, which represents not only God, but all of His works, if you are outside of that context, you have no reason to have anything but doubt and fear and darkness and grumbling. Because if you do have some strong thing you are holding on to that makes you thankful and optimistic, it is nothing more than sinking sand. But if in the name of God you exist, if in the context of the person and work of God you live, then you have cause to be thankful in everything.

And not only do you have cause, you are commanded to do so. As 1 Thessalonians tells us, this is the will of God for you. It is God's will that you do not murder.

It is God's will that you do not lie. It is God's will that you do not commit adultery. It is God's will that you have no other gods before Him.

It is God's will that you be thankful in everything. With the same intensity. This is God's will.

You have a wayward thought or a lustful thought and immediately you recognize it as sin. You have an unthankful spirit and it is just you are having a bad day. No.

It is sin. It is sin. With what is waiting for us in the future, how could we be anything but thankful? Now, I want us to notice a few other things about this Ephesians 5 text.

Look at the source. The source. It is what? Filled with the Spirit.

Filled with the Spirit. Now, we are going to get back to that in a minute. But first of all, let's go on to Colossians 3, 16 and 17.

Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Here again, in everything we are to give thanks. Now, what is going on here? The emphasis is not on the filling of the Spirit, but the emphasis is on the Word of Christ richly dwelling within you.

Now, many people will see the word, word here and automatically assume it is talking about proverbs and psalms and principles and everything. And in a general way, yes, we know that the one who meditates on the Word of God will be like a tree firmly planted by rivers of water. But when it says, Word of Christ, even though that can also in a general way refer to the teachings of Christ, I see it more as referring to the Gospel itself if we want to be specific about the matter.

And so what is one of the main ways in which you and I can live a life of thankfulness? And that is through the power of the Holy Spirit and through this Gospel richly indwelling us. Meditating upon the Gospel, thinking about the Gospel, learning about the Gospel. We've already learned in Ephesians that it's something of putting a helmet of salvation on our head to protect our minds.

And our minds are what directs our hearts in many ways in its thankfulness. What you've got to understand is that you and I must live this life through the power of the indwelling Spirit and we must live this life through the power of the indwelling Word, specifically the Gospel, coming to greater and greater comprehension of it and that producing in us greater and greater joy and greater and greater thankfulness. Thankfulness.

Thankfulness. You know, oftentimes when a child says, you know, Mom, I don't want to eat... Let's see, what would be an example in our house? Quinoa. I don't want to eat beans.

I don't want to eat this fish the way you made it. And a mother's response is always, well, if you were starving over in Afghanistan, you would much more appreciate what's being put in front of you. Well, that's really not the way Christianity works.

We should. It is a disgrace that we would not be thankful for food put in front of us because of the people who do starve in this world, but that's not the way Christianity works. Christianity, when it comes to an unthankful believer who's in just a funk of a spirit and he no longer is thankful for anything, someone might

come to him well-being and say, well, you could be thankful at least you're not in hell, and that's true, but that's not the way the Scripture approaches it.

The Scripture says, look at all he's done. Bask in all that he's done for you. Comprehend to a greater degree what awaits you.

As I get older and older, there's something that is becoming more and more important theologically to me. John Piper wrote it this way in his book Future Grace. It's not just the grace I've received that saved me.

It's not just the grace that I receive now that sustains me and helps me grow the little that I grow, but it's also this idea of what's waiting for me. There is a sense, a real sense, a biblical sense in which life has begun in me, the day of my conversion. There is another sense in which life has yet to begin.

When the lights, the meager candle of this life is put out because the sun is rising. Explosion of life. Joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Liberation from sin, from every awkward thought to be whole, complete, perfect before Him. Eternity of rapture, of joy. Every day, greater discoveries of the greatness of God.

Whether I'm beholding His face in the temple, in His courtyard, or whether I'm out looking at stars that no one's ever seen, it'll all be joy and it'll all be pointing back at Him. That's what's waiting for us. So when you just have a spirit that is just grunge, that is just dark, that just can't see anything to be thankful for, it tells you, it grabs you, the Scriptures do, by the head and twists you to look at what God has done for you in Christ.

Look at that. Look at that cross. Look at that resurrection.

Look what He's done. Now turn this way. Look what He's going to do.

Now turn back and look what He's already done. Always putting on emphasis, aren't we, on what we're not. What we're not, what we don't have.

What we're not, what we don't have. It's a phenomenal miracle. It is an unspeakable miracle.

Here it is Wednesday. It's beautiful. It's about time to kayak.

There are all kinds of people doing all kinds of wonderful things all around this area, whether it's in the mountains or the streams. You young people are gathered here to hear an old preacher. That's a miracle.

Look what He's done to you. Some of you before would have been drinking, would have been partying. Finals are over.

Let's get intoxicated so we don't even know who we are for the next week. But look at you. You're here.

You don't have to just look at what He's going to do. Look what He's done to you. You see? That's why we should be thankful.

Now, I want us to look at one other text about thankfulness, and it's Romans 8. And we've already alluded to it briefly, but let's look at it more clearly. This is foundational to understanding joy and thankfulness and thanksgiving. It says in verse 28, And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and to those who are called according to His purpose.

There are some verses of Scripture that if they were not there, I don't know what we'd do. Because they set forth a certain truth unlike all the other Scriptures put together with regard to a certain doctrine. And this one is one of those texts.

If this was not here, I don't know what we would do. And we know. That's the first key to joy.

That's the first key to thanksgiving. We know. We're not doubtful.

We know that God causes all things to work how? Together for good. Everything. Everything for His people.

You need to understand something. Everything is yours. Everything is yours.

I know that if I don't define what I'm talking about, I'm going to sound like some prosperity preacher. But everything is yours. Everything God does in this world, He is doing it for the sake of the church and for His people.

Everything that's moving, whether it's the rise of nations or the falls of nations, whether it's peace or war, famine, prosperity, life, death, suffering, pleasure, everything is for you. That God might take all of this and work it into your life for the good. Now I don't want to stand up here and pretend that this text is rock solid in my heart and so every time there is adversity, I have thanksgiving.

No, there's often times when I am just weak and wrong and sinful. And do you know what it always comes back down to? And this is a question you've got to ask yourself. Whenever I'm that way, it's because I don't want what God wants.

I don't want what God wants. Or, I want what God wants, but I don't want it God's way. I want it the easy way.

There's a song, and I wish I could quote it verbatim from John Newton. And it's not a very well known song, but I think it's one of his best, if not the best. He talks about how in prayer, he asked that God would do a work of grace in him.

And he expected that in praying that, God would somehow meet with him one day in prayer, and just pour forth grace and transform him. What God did to answer that prayer was to open up the very gates of hell against him. So that he suffered like he had never suffered before in his life.

And when he complained to God, God, why? Why? God said, I'm only doing what you asked me to do. Do you see that? I see people, and they're in a difficult relationship, in a difficult marriage, and they want out. Why do they want out? Because they don't want what God wants.

They do not want what God wants. Because see, God is telling them, look, even this, I am working in. That if you hold tight, hold on.

If you believe Me, if you continue on, I'm going to work good in you. I'm going to conform you to the image of Christ as the next verse tells us, it is the good that He's working. And we go, no, I'd rather have an easy marriage.

I'd rather have a handsome, rich husband that's easy to get along with. I would rather have this or that or so many other things. Yes, I want conformity! But I want this too! See that? God knows exactly what you

need.

Why is it that sometimes when a man is at the very height of his ministry, and I know of a couple of cases, very height of his ministry, preaching ministry and everything else, and he's struck down by cancer, and spends the next several months, if not years, weakened by chemotherapy and sick as a dog, when you would think he should be exegeting texts all around the world. But no, he's been struck down by cancer. Why? I'll tell you why.

Because God loves that man more than He loves that man's ministry. God doesn't need that man. He lets that man participate.

But He doesn't need him, but God does love him, and in loving him, God sees that he needs to be conformed to Christ, and in God's wisdom, He says, it's this way that it's got to happen. Do you see that? Why is it some of the godliest men that I know who long to be called to preach, and have knowledge to preach, but aren't called to preach? Why is it that there are so many conflictive things going on within the body? Because He wants us to be like Christ. Is that what you want? Can you stand there and say, take it all, do whatever.

Well, let me caution you. That's the boldest kind of praying you can do. It really is.

It's the boldest kind of praying you can do. God, make me like Jesus. I can remember after being a Christian there at the University of Texas, me and a friend of mine, praying through the night one night, almost all the way through to the morning, and all we were praying, God, I remember how dumb I was.

Crying, oh God, I don't care. You'll kill me, grind me, do whatever, but make me like Jesus. I just want to be like Jesus at all costs.

I remember several years later, I'm walking out on top of a house in Peru. My hips are worn to pieces. I can't even hardly walk.

The pain is so excruciating. I'm throwing up, and I'm tears running down my face, and I'm going, why, why, why? No, I didn't hear a voice, but I remembered that dorm room prayer session, and I realized I'm answering your prayer. This is just one of those steps.

Conflicts in relationships, conflicts with wife or husband, conflicts with children, conflicts here, there, everywhere. What's He doing? He's working the good. Now, I do not say, hang on like John Wayne onto a wild bull.

But I do say this, believe. Believe Him. Know what He has said.

Believe Him. Believe Him. Now, of course, we don't have time to go through the rest of this, but I suppose this is enough.

You, you are more precious to Him than anything He could do through you. And that's why He'll even nip a person in the very flower of their life when they seem like they ought to have so much more headed. He'll nip them.

He'll wound them. He'll do so many things. Why? Because He loves His children much more than He needs them.

Because He does not need them at all. But He loves them beyond description. And His goal, see, we got it all backwards in the West, don't we? Because a man is measured, a woman is measured by what they are able to accomplish.

But in Scripture, a man and a woman is measured by what they become conformed to the image of Christ. And in that, we can say a man is measured, a woman is measured by the grace of God, by what Christ has done for them. Perfectly righteous before God because of Christ.

Perfectly accepted in the Beloved. How can we not rejoice? We who were hostile and enemies of God and deserved judgment everlasting. If He had simply put us in a cooler place in hell, that would be cause enough to be thankful.

Or if He snatched us out of hell entirely and put us in some neutral zone, some limbo, neither suffering, neither seeing His presence, that would be a cause for us to rejoice and to be thankful. And if He had simply taken away our sins and made us able to stand outside heaven and look through the window, that would have been more than anyone could have ever imagined and for which we should be eternally thankful. Or if He had made us like angels and with the privilege of at least standing in His presence and ministering to Him for His ministers are a flame of fire, that would have been far more than what we could have ever imagined.

But He made us sons and daughters and co-heirs with Christ. How can we not be thankful? Well, I'm proof that we can. That doesn't make it any more right.

Maybe some of the wickedest things we do are things that we don't see wicked. The wickedest thing we can do is not believe our God, to not rejoice, to not be thankful. Be thankful.

Now, some of you, because of this, your thankfulness has been diminished a bit tonight because you've started realizing you're not thankful which has made you even more bothered than when you came in here. That's not the purpose of this. The purpose is to say, lay it all aside, look at Christ, look at the Gospel and be thankful that all your sins are gone, past, present and future, and you are at this moment completely righteous in Christ before God and He loves you with an undiminished love.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your Spirit.

Thank You for Your Son. Please help us, Lord, to live in a manner worthy of this great calling. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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