

Giving Thanks

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)

In this passage, we are instructed to make the choice to express joy, at all times. That doesn't mean we will always have the joyful motivation to rejoice, but we are instructed to make the choice to rejoice at all times. Unless we choose to focus on Jesus, that is generally an impossibility to do it consistently.

If this practice of rejoicing is founded on a continual discipline of prayer-fellowship, then our focus is well fixed on Jesus. If prayer is not part of this process, then it is hard to rejoice in the face of stressful challenges to our faith.

He follows by saying to give thanks in all things. He didn't say the problem was the will of God, but our response of thanksgiving to the problem is. We live in a negative world, and sometimes negative things happen to us. Giving thanks is not a religious response we give to the worship leader's instruction when we are in church, but it is an attitude that motivates us to think differently in a world filled with "stinkin' thinkin'" as the norm.

Giving thanks is our response because we believe God is responding to our situation in ways that we may or may not see. We respond with thanks because whatever happens cannot overwhelm the presence of the Holy Spirit that indwells us and is constantly releasing God's provision into our lives. Giving thanks is not something mechanical, it is a revelation that indwells us because of our belief that God is actually in control whether the situation supports that truth or not.

The Scripture is filled with examples of God's intervention in the lives of His covenant people. Often, accounts are given as to how God has done wonderful things as we journey with Him. But Paul's journey took him to places that we readily accept as ones we do not want to follow in. There are certainly times we do not "want" to lift our hearts and hands and give thanks to God because our attitude is dominated by the surrounding circumstances we have encountered. So here Paul is addressing an attitude, not simply a mechanical response that identifies us as spiritual people who think differently.

It is difficult to give thanks when our comfort zone has been pressured and overturned by the events we face. Each of us have hopes and plans that are set and we don't want changed by what we cannot control. But sometimes, those kinds of things happen. What is at the core of our relationship with the Father, then, determines the overflow of our words and direction our choices take us in.

No one has this battle won. Hopefully we have grown and developed mature attitudes beyond what we may have had in the past. But we will always have to make these choices daily to fully surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. We recognize because of a world in which we live we are forced daily to respond to negatives. Even though we would rather not be faced with these kinds of challenges, each one has the potential to serve as a means by which we can grow more in the area of godly responses.

So, Paul, who is well experienced in challenges, gives us advice that will take us through anything we face. Regardless of the degree of difficulty, attitudes such as thankfulness become the foundation for successful and overcoming living.