

Thes 5:15-28

15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul is continuing this morning with instructions about living in the church. And it is easy to see that Paul doesn't always expect it to go smoothly.

Has anyone in a church ever hurt you? Has anyone in **this** church ever hurt you? I would be shocked if anyone here would say, no, no one here has ever hurt me. If we are operating at all like a church family, we are going to pay a price for each other's weaknesses. And whether you know it or not, you have **probably hurt someone here** if you are really sharing your life with them. We pay a price for each other's weaknesses and blindnesses and propensities. That is life in a regular family. That is life in the church family.

When many people experience a fellow believer's failure, they want to quit. They want to take their ball and go home. That is a natural reaction. And that is the problem. The church is too important to quit on. Christ won't allow us to quit. Sometimes, if a church is not acting like a church we may need to join a different one. But as long as there are **church families**, there will be **church family problems**.

That is why we need Paul so bad.

Paul is giving instructions to stop the hurt.

15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

I have never noticed this before, but Paul is still speaking to the church. He is telling the church not to repay anyone evil for evil. This assumes that church people sometimes do evil to other church people. Paul earlier talked about **sexual sin** and **not defrauding his brother**. How can anyone do a greater evil

if this involves married people? Could a Christian do such an evil? Certainly. He cannot live in it. But a Christian can certainly commit this sin.

So what do you do when someone does evil to you. Well, this is what you **do not** do. You do not seek revenge. You may seek other actions for the good of all parties. This does not relegate a person to inaction. But one does not return evil for evil. We cannot get revenge.

Now sometimes the good we seek is a **painful** good. It may mean exposing a person's sin. It may mean something as serious as a dissolution of a marriage. But it cannot mean **revenge**. Jesus is the only one fit to repay these situations. And so He will. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. I will repay. He promises to repay. So we do not have to. Nor are we allowed to. Think about the wrong David did to Uriah. God gave David severe consequences for his sin.

Maybe some of us aren't so inclined to actually carry out vengeance. But some of us might be more prone to be passive aggressive. We are prone to hurt each other pretending to be oblivious of any harmful intentions. That is a form of vengeance but it is more dishonest than straight out vengeance.

Our goal should be to do good. Again, that good may be confrontational. That good may have some heat to it. That good may expose evil. It might embarrass people. But we must do whatever we do with the sincere intention to do right by all parties involved.

seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

This goes beyond the church. **Everyone** includes, well, **everyone**. Do you have a chance to get even with someone who did you wrong at work? Don't do it. Could you hurt someone who hurt you in your past? Don't do it. You need to ask, what is the best thing I can do for this person to reconcile them to Christ. Do that thing. Even unbelievers.

We often talk about how life changing biblical principles are. What would happen if we were absorbed with thoughts of **doing good to others**?

Thoughts like, how can I respond to **do good** to this person. Praying, Lord please show me how I can do good to this person? **Praying for good** for this person. Running everyone we meet through the sieve of, how can I do them good?

That would leave very little room for harboring grudges or getting bitter. And it would have the effect of **drawing people to us** and us having an opportunity to minister to their real needs.

It is so simple. But it is so life changing. How can I do this person good?

Next Paul moves to the believer's relationship with God. How are they to live in relationship to God. What should they do? How should they think? And Paul gives them very helpful instructions. He tells them what they must do toward God.

16 Rejoice always,

We need to keep in mind that this was written to people who were being singled out for hatred solely because they were following Christ. And Paul could look them square in the eye and without hesitation tell them to **always be rejoicing**.

Why. Why would he demand this in face of their difficulties? I think if Paul said this **to us** on **a bad day** we would give him an argument. Paul, can't you sympathize with the pain I am feeling? Can't you see that my life is hard. Don't you think it is a little insensitive to tell me to rejoice in my situation. You can't just turn these things on and off you know. Why aren't you cutting me a break and being more sympathetic to my sadness. Isn't that what we often think?

But Paul didn't seem to be moved by such an argument.

This is what he said about his own circumstances.

2 Corinthians 6:8–10 (ESV)

8 We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Paul is not denying the truth of the pain that we face as human beings. But Paul does not allow the pain to define how he will respond. He chooses to act and not react. He feels the sorrow. And yet he chooses to rejoice.

How? How can a Christian rejoice in the midst of suffering? This is a question that we need the answer to. Because we are sure to face suffering. And we are commanded to rejoice.

Rejoicing has to come from a solid place. It has to be based in a reality that transcends the pain. The good that is **certain to happen to us** has to be greater than the **pain we are sure to experience**.

John Lillie notes some of our reasons for rejoicing in Christ:

What is there that our ruined nature needs, which it cannot find in Christ?—atoning blood, to cleanse from all sin—a righteousness, in which not even the eye of the Divine holiness can discern spot or blemish—

subduing, renewing power, to form us into the Divine image—a Teacher, to instruct our ignorance—a Friend, to cheer us—a kindred High Priest, to intercede for us in the heavenly places, and reconcile us to God—a wise, faithful, gentle, almighty Shepherd, to lead us, and feed us, and guard us through the wilderness into the bright, spacious, ever fresh and unfading pastures of eternity.

End quote.

According to Peter, rejoicing in Jesus is one of the chief marks of a true Christian. He writes: “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Richard D. Phillips, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 250–251.

This is from John MacArthur. He did a study on what scripture says about what fuels our joy:

A proper perspective on biblical joy provides numerous reasons for believers to rejoice. All of the references will be on the Sermon Audio document.

First of all, they should rejoice always in appreciation for **God’s righteous character**, which, even in trouble, He demonstrates so faithfully to believers. The psalmist declared, “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him” (Ps. 28:7; cf. Neh. 8:10; Pss. 71:23; 89:16; Isa. 61:10).

Second, they should have constant joy out of **appreciation for Christ’s redemptive work**, which derives from a gracious, loving, merciful, and compassionate God (Luke 2:10; 10:20; Rom. 5:1–2, 11; 1 Peter 1:8–9), and for His infallible instruction (John 15:11; 16:30; 1 John 5:20).

Third, they should rejoice in **appreciation of the Holy Spirit’s ministry** on their behalf (Acts 10:44; Rom. 14:17; cf. 8:14–27).

Fourth, believers should rejoice always because of the **vast array of spiritual blessings they possess** (cf. Eph. 1:3–4; Phil. 4:13, 19; Col. 2:9–14; 2 Peter 1:3).

Fifth, they should have joy in **God’s providence** as He orchestrates everything for their benefit (Rom. 8:28–30; James 1:2–4).

Sixth, they should be joyful out of **gratitude for the promise of future glory** (cf. Ps. 16:8–11; Matt. 5:12; Luke 10:20; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 1:18–21; 3:20; Jude 24). **Seventh, answered prayer** should always be a source of joy (Pss. 66:20; 116:1, 17; 118:21; John 16:24),

Eighth reason, an appreciation for the **gift of God’s Word** (Col. 3:16; cf. Pss. 19:7–11; 119:14, 111, 162; Jer. 15:16).

Ninth, the privilege of **genuine fellowship** should bring continual joy to the believer (1 Thess. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philem. 7; 2 John 12).

Tenth, true believers cannot help but express their joy at **the saving proclamation of the gospel**, as the early church did: “Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they [Paul, Barnabas, and other believers] were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren” (Acts 15:3; cf. Phil. 1:18).

John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 & 2 Thessalonians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 185.

Notice that rejoicing doesn't come out of thin air. It is fueled by mental content. It is fueled by Biblical truth. Do you have trouble rejoicing? Well, what are you thinking about? What are you focusing on? Do you want to feel like rejoicing? Do you want to feel joy? Think about the things that produce joy in a believer. Mr. MacArthur gives us a wonderful list. I will try to remember to put the pdf of this sermon in Sermon Audio so you can print out his list if you like.

17 pray without ceasing,

When you hear this, do you think- Oh no. another thing I need to do. And I need to do it all the time. And I am already real busy. Well you can relax. This actually works out differently than you might first think.

I am continually surprised by how God places a resource in my life right before it is needed. Some friends put me onto an excellent book on prayer. It was the first book I remember reading that did **not make me feel bad about not praying** as much as it offered prayer as a relief to my burdens. I love this book and heartily recommend it.

A praying life- Paul E Miller

His section on praying without ceasing is excellent. I am borrowing some of his focus because I think he is right.

Do you remember when we studied the concept of being poor in spirit in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the quality of a Christian that realizes our **continual inability** to live as we ought. We want to be able to do **the right things**, the **pure things**, the **good things**. We want to think **pure thoughts**. We want to love God and love people as we ought. But when we look at our personal human tank, there is no fuel to do so. That resource is not in our flesh, in our human talents and abilities. We are poor. It has to come from **outside** of ourselves.

That is the incentive for praying without ceasing. Prayer isn't as much a discipline then, as a calling upon God for the resources to live a spiritual life. In everything.

Is it a discipline for you to eat? No. You are driven to eat by your need to eat. Is it a discipline to drink or to sleep? No. Our needs drive it. Well prayer is meant to be that way too. At least the prayer that is continual.

How does that look?

I wake up in the morning worried about a situation in my life. I pray Lord I give this to you. You care about me. You placed this in my life in your wisdom.

Thank you. I trust you.

Someone thinks of something that needs done and that idea conflicts with the rest of the things I have planned. Lord, I am not sure how to prioritize here.

Give me wisdom to do what is best. Help me to respond properly.

I think of some stupid thing I did in the past that I am embarrassed about.

Lord thank you for that. It helps me keep perspective of who I am apart from you.

I see a mother with unruly kids at the grocery store. Lord help that mother learn how to deal with those kids.

I wish this was how I lived, in constructive positive prayer like this all the time. I don't. But I want to. Do you? Does this look like a discipline? I don't think it is. It is a **relief**. It is an escape from my **inability** and a **rescue** by **God's ability**. It is like walking through life with a loving father who **knows all** and **can do all** right next to me. I am conversing about life with Him, while more than that, I am drawing on His resources because mine are always inadequate.

There are many profound prayers in scripture that are very very short. Father forgive me the sinner is one of the hugest spiritual prayers in all of scripture. We see a bunch in the gospels and Acts.

We definitely need times of dedicated prayer, times when we free ourselves from distraction like Jesus did. Those may take more discipline. Because the devil will do anything to keep us from those. But praying without ceasing is more of a spiritual **necessity** when we really believe what scripture tells us **about ourselves**. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. When we really believe that, when we see it in our lives, then we start getting it in our heads. I **need** to talk to God. I **need** Him right now. I **need** His help. I **need** His guidance. I need His strength. I need His intervention. And everyone I love, they need it too.

So we are to be always rejoicing, always in prayer, and here is another always.

18 give thanks in all circumstances;

Your car leaves you stranded on the highway.

Your dentist tells you you need a \$2000 dental implant.

Your doctor tells you you have cancer.

Your spouse leaves you.

Your child is ill.

Paul must not mean in all circumstances. He must mean something else.

Isn't that our first response to this passage? Where is the opt-out clause?

Well we know that there isn't one.

When you look deeply at your life, at your very existence, what is it that you most want your life to be? A Christian may say it a dozen different ways, and it may fluctuate in **bad ways** at times. But a Christian wants to **please His Lord**. He wants to be found **living for** Christ and **honoring** Christ. He wants the things He does to reflect the salvation He has been given at Christ's expense.

Is that what you find?

If you do not, that is a serious problem. You should make it a top priority in your life to **find out why** and to call out to God to **help you fix it**.

But if that is what you find, then what do you know about life situations?

James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:12 (ESV)

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

These are just two examples. There are many more. Trials are the tools that God uses to chisel away the parts that do not look like Him. Trials are the tools to prepare us for a home that has a very different culture than ours.

Trials are the tools in God's skilled hand to move us in the direction of perfection.

If we tell God that we **resent the tools**, we are telling God we either do not **trust His wisdom** to make us what our hearts desire to be, or we are telling Him we **really don't want to be that person** all that bad. We want the end result but we reject the process to get us there.

Can you see where this is headed.

Thanks makes sense. Thanks in every circumstance, in every trial, in every loss, in every disappointment makes sense. It is not a weird form of masochism. Athletes often chose to join teams that have coaches that will cause them more pain than any other coach. Why? They want to win in the end. They want to be on the winning team. They want to be shaped into being the best player they can be.

That is the sense behind Christians giving thanks in all circumstances.

Is your spouse sometimes difficult to deal with? That is God's school for you to become like Jesus.

Do you wonder where the money is going to come from to cover the latest catastrophe? That is God's school for you to become like Jesus.

Have you suffered a serious loss of someone you love in your life. That is God's school for you to become like Jesus.

God does not **waste pain** in the life of a believer. He uses it. The more we trust Him, the more we are relieved that, while we have no clue **how** He is using it, we know Him well enough to know that **He knows**.

We cannot face life without knowing this: **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

In any circumstance, we may be tempted to say, "But you don't know what it is like." And yeah, that might be true. And maybe we would fail in that same circumstance. But **Christ** knows what it is like. And that is where this command comes from. In the end, **my** experience or **your** experience does not matter. What **God says** is what matters.

Have you ever met a person who is strikingly thankful? You will notice something else about them. They are also happy. Your feelings follow your thinking. How can **joy** not be the result when your brain is trained to focus on the **goodness of God** in every situation? How can you help but carry a degree of happiness when even your sorrow carries with it another side, a useful side, a constructive side. It may not be understood, but we can trust it is useful and meaningful.

Do you find yourself bummed out? What is the last thing you gave thanks for and in? A Christian does not give thanks only as an emotional reaction to pleasant things happening to him. He gives thanks as a **matter of policy** because He has a **good God** looking after Him. We may find that many of our emotional problems would go away if we learned to give thanks all the time.

When bad things happen we have a tendency to say- “I don’t need this right now.” And we are wrong. It wouldn’t happen if we didn’t need it right now. God would not have allowed it. It is serving some eternal purpose.

So we **give thanks** in all things because **in all things** it is **appropriate** to give thanks. Our mind over time gets trained to trust and expect good results from our loving Father. Our view of our circumstances changes and we find that we have more to rejoice about. Which drives our continual rejoicing. And that drives us to closeness to our Father who we want to communicate with continually.

That is the cycle we want to create. That is the life of joy and peace and usefulness. And it is good. If not for the world, the flesh and the devil, we would already be addicted to it.

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

From what I understand, this portion of the verse is talking about the three instructions Paul just gave.

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances

That is God’s will. When we ask God for His will about what car we buy or what life path to take, that is fine. God’s children would talk to God about that. Maybe He gives us clear direction. Maybe He doesn’t.

But **this** will, we don’t need to ask about.

God wants every one of us to always be rejoicing, to always be praying, and to always be thanking.

What a wonderful experiment this would be. Let’s commit to doing it this week. I mean really commit to doing it. Put reminders wherever you need to. Just do it very intentionally for a week and let’s report on the results.

I am guessing this isn’t the kind of thing that we already **aren’t doing at all**. I am sure we are practicing **some** of these things **some** of the time. But this week let’s go all out and see what the grace of God brings us.

After all this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. We can know without a doubt that this is exactly what God wants you and I to do this week. There is no argument about that.