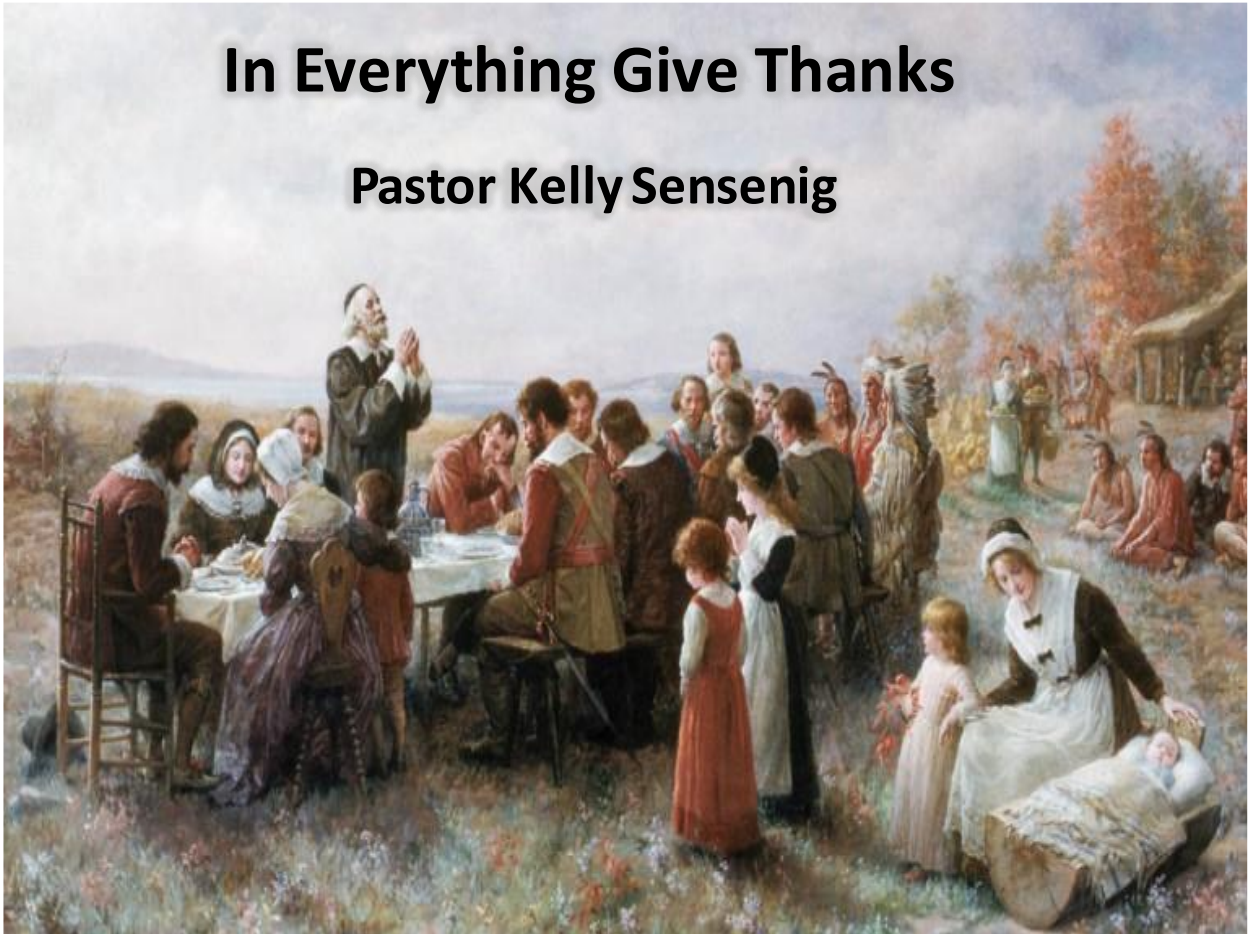


In Everything Give Thanks

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



Thanksgiving is a national holiday in America. There's an interesting history to how the National Day of Thanksgiving came about. You will recall how the Pilgrim's arrived in America. On December 18, 1620, the Mayflower landed on Plymouth Rock wanting to establish a colony. The Mayflower was intended to land in Virginia, but storms shifted the ship's course north. As a result, they landed in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. After exploring the area, the Mayflower pilgrims eventually decided to stay, partially due to harsh seas and dwindling supplies.

Governor William Bradford and the people (the separatists) endured many hardships while sailing to this new world. William Bradford lost his wife. She drowned on the journey here to America. Many settlers died of scurvy and malnutrition during that horrible first winter. Of the 102 original Mayflower passengers, only 44 survived. Like in Jamestown Virginia, the kindness of the local Native Americans saved them from a frosty death.

By early 1621, the Pilgrims had built crude huts and a common house on the shores of Plymouth Bay. Neighboring Indians began to build relations with the Pilgrims. In 1623 the elected governor William Bradford issued a proclamation establishing that there would be a day of Thanksgiving. Bradford of Massachusetts made this first Thanksgiving Proclamation three years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth:

"Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

"Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the daytime, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings."

William Bradford

Ye Governor of Ye Colony

The participants celebrated dining on venison, goose, duck, turkey, fish, and of course, cornbread, the result of a bountiful corn harvest. This tradition was repeated at harvest time in the following years. The Plymouth Pilgrims celebrated their survival, as well as the hopes of God's blessings in the years that lay ahead. So at Plymouth Massachusetts, a little handful of devoted people in the midst of many perils and great hardships, set apart a day for thanksgiving to God. This is how our nation started and connected to its beginning we discover the roots of Thanksgiving. Don't let anybody tell you that America was not founded as a nation that believes in almighty God. The cancel culture of our day has been propagating a series of lies as it rewrites our nation's history seeking to remove God and His providence in bringing the country of America into existence.

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln established a National Day of Thanksgiving on the fourth Tuesday of November. It was in the middle of the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed this national Thanksgiving holiday. He said at that time, 'No human counsel has devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the most high God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.' President Roosevelt later moved Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of November.

In this study we are going to look at one of the most important Bible verses related to thanksgiving. It's not referring to Thanksgiving as a holiday but as a way of life. This is because the Bible teaches that thanksgiving should be part of our everyday worship as we pass through the many changes related to life.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Somone said:

"If you pause to think, you'll have cause to thank."

The word "thanks" (eucharisteo) means to be grateful, feel thankful, to express gratitude. We get our English word Eucharist from this word which means gratitude. The Christian's life is to be an unceasing eucharist! It's to be a continual life of thanks, gratitude, and praise rendered unto to God.

Daniel 6:10 says:

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

Every day was a Thanksgiving Day for Daniel and the same should be for each one of us as God's children today. Colossians 3:15 says, 'And be thankful' – and not just say on Thanksgiving Day! It's not merely Thanksgiving that counts but thanks-living!

“Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things had done
In whom His world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath led us on our way
With countless gifts of love
And still is ours today.”

The Bible teaches that our entire life is to be a continual stream of thanks and praise rendered unto God. “In every thing give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18). In spite of the changes and challenges that we might face in our lives, we are to have a continual spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude in our hearts toward God.

We can always be thankful and filled with gratitude toward God.

This truth is revealed in the text of 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

I. The command of thanksgiving – “give thanks.”

This is not God’s suggestion but an exhortation to be thankful in all circumstances of life. I want to put the emphasis on giving thanks (“give thanks”) before mentioning anything else about this text. Thankfulness should be part of the very fabric of the life of a born-again Christian.

Don't miss the important fact that the giving of thanks is in the Greek present tense which calls for this to be our habitual or ongoing attitude and action! This is not something we do sporadically, but it should be something that we do spontaneously on a daily basis as give our hearts to God in praise. How much thanksgiving have you been giving to God? How often do you express gratitude to God for the many things He has done for you? When you look back you should be thankful. When you look at today you should be thankful. When you look to the future you can also be thankful that God is sovereign over the events of your life and will direct and help you through whatever lies ahead.

Various Bible verses reveal that our prayers should be filled with praise and thanksgiving unto God!

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be careful (*anxious*) for nothing (*about anything*); but in every thing (blessings, sickness, sorrow, tragedy, testing) by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Notice the linking together of prayer and thanksgiving. Our prayers should consist of a steady diet of thanksgiving. There is something presented in these verses that is very helpful for our Christian living. It's presented as a building crescendo: “Anxious for nothing (trust in God), prayerful in everything (petition before God), thankful for anything (gratitude toward God), peaceful through all things (serenity from God).”

“It's not the work but the worry
That makes the world grow old,
That numbers the years of its children
Ere half their story is told,
That weakens their faith in heaven
And the wisdom of God's great plan,
It's not the work but the worry
That breaks the heart of man.”

Colossians 4:2

“Continue in prayer (*remain in prayer*), and watch (*remain spiritually alert*) in the same with thanksgiving” (*remain in thanksgiving*)

The relation of thanksgiving to our prayer life is very important. We should make it a point to give thanks or express gratitude to God in our prayers. We worship God as we pray and give thanks to Him. Thanksgiving is to be part of our overall worship experience among other fellow believers.

Psalm 35:18

“I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people.”

There are many other Bible verses that instruct us to be thankful!

Psalm 106:1

“Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is good*: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.”

When the early church met, one of its main purposes was to give thanks to God (1 Cor. 14:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:1).

Colossians 3:17

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

We sometimes forget to be thankful on a daily basis.

Hebrews 13:15

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (*the natural outflow of praise from our hearts and lives*), that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.”

Thankfulness seems to be a lost art today. Many years ago there was a ministerial student in Evanston, Illinois, who was part of a life-saving squad. In 1860, a ship went aground on the shore of Lake Michigan near Evanston, and Edward Spencer waded again and again into the frigid waters to rescue 17 passengers. In the process, his health was permanently damaged. Some years later at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him.

Thanksgiving should not be a chore to do in our Christian life, but an automatic expression of gratitude given to God for the great things He has done in our lives. As we will see from our main text, even in times of great anxiety, fear, worry, and stress, a prayerful attitude of thanksgiving should characterize our lives. God can

work in our heart in such a way that we can be thankful even when everything seems to be going against us.

Rudyard Kipling was a great British poet whose writings have blessed many of us, including a generation gone by. Rudyard Kipling was a very famous writer even before he died and made a great deal of money at his trade. A newspaper reporter came up to him once and said, 'Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over \$100 a word.' Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, "Really, I certainly wasn't aware of that." The reporter cynically reached into his pocket and pulled out a \$100 bill and gave it to Kipling and said, "Here's a \$100 bill Mr. Kipling. Now you give me one of your \$100 words." Rudyard Kipling looked at that \$100 bill for a moment, took it and folded it up and put it in his pocket and gave him his 100-dollar word which was this: "Thanks."

Well, the word "thanks" (and especially thanks to God) is certainly a \$100 word. In fact, I would say it is more like a million-dollar word. This is one word that is too seldom heard, too rarely spoken, and too often forgotten. But it must come from the lips of God's redeemed! God should hear it come from our heart to His heart. We cannot give enough thanks to God for all the things He has done for us!

“How can I say thanks?
For the things You have done for me
Things so underserved
Yet you give to prove your love for me
The voices of a million angels
Cannot express my gratitude
All that I am and ever hope to be
I owe it all to Thee.”

In his book FOLK PSALMS OF FAITH, Ray Stedman tells of an experience H. A. Ironside had in a crowded restaurant. Just as Ironside was about to begin his meal, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat.

Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer. When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, "Do you have a headache?" Ironside replied, "No, I don't." The other man asked, "Well, is there something wrong with your food?" Ironside replied, "No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat."

The man said, "Oh, you're one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow, and I don't have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!"

Ironside said, "Yes, you're just like my dog. That's what he does too!"

We can always be thankful and filled with gratitude toward God. The text in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 goes on to say something else that is very important.

II. The extent of our thanksgiving – “in everything”

Does everything really mean everything? Yes! We are called upon to give thanks in all the circumstances that we face in life. During our younger days we have challenges that we must face that many times are related to growing up. As we grow older, we may have other challenges related to failing health and the great trial of losing a loved one in death. However, Paul is teaching that there is to be an element of gratitude or thankfulness as we pass through trials at any stage and age of life.

A mother related this story: “Ryan, was 5, he offered the following prayer during our family devotions: ‘Dear Jesus, sorry for the mess we made in the yard today.’ After a slight pause, he concluded, ‘Thank you for the fun we had doing it.’ I don’t think this is what it means to give thanks in everything!

The well-known Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, had a grip on this passage when it says “in ever thing give thanks.” One day as Henry was going down the street he was accosted and robbed. Later Matthew Henry wrote in his diary: "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my

all, it was not much; and fourth: because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed."

The phrase "in everything" means that we can give thanks at all times, in every situation, under every circumstance, before, during, and after trials, in the bright days of gladness when the sun is shining over our head, but also in the dark nights of fear when the cloud of darkness is hovering over our head. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 commands believers to give thanks to the Lord for everything that comes into their lives, including trials, since whatever it might be can result in our spiritual growth, greater dependence upon God, and Christlike development.

The meaning of giving thanks "in every thing" should not be used as an excuse for us to sin. In other words, we can misuse and misapply this verse by concluding we are thankful for the sin that has come into our lives and somehow justify our sin and keep engaging in it. We should not give God thanks for our acts of our sin and rebellion by saying, "Thank You Lord that I chose adultery, infidelity, lust, pride, and anger." This is not repentance but a cover up to commit more sin with God's alleged approval. What 1 Thessalonians 5:18 means is that in the midst of any situation or circumstance we face and pass through, including sinful departure from the Lord, we should find causes for thanksgiving, such as God's mercies and forgiveness, His continual and unconditional love for us, what God is doing in our lives, and how He is working in ways we cannot see. Psalm 119:67 reveals that we can be thankful and possess a right attitude for God's corrective measures in our life. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."

We can be thankful of the specific trials we pass through for what these trials do for us, how they mold us and make us into a better Christian. And yes, even when we sin and blow it in life, we can say with a repentant heart, "Dear God, thanks for Your grace and forgiveness. And thank You for what I can learn through my waywardness. Life outside your will is empty, fruitless, and meaningless. Thank you for teaching me the lessons and reaffirming in my heart the importance of being holy and dedicated to You. And thank You for never giving up on me."

Acts 16:25 reveals this:

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."

This prison experience reminds us that our worship of praise and thanksgiving should occur during the very hard and difficult times we are facing in life. “In every thing give thanks.”

Sam Gorden wrote:

“When we are happy to leave everything with the Lord, he gives us a spirit of gratitude and also an attitude of heartfelt appreciation no matter what falls into our lap. Show me a grumbler, take me to a complainer—it is a sad fact but I know before I meet them that I will be introduced to a couple of negative, sour, miserable individuals who have effectively distanced themselves from the Spirit of God. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare wrote: ‘Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend!... How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child!’ However, when we are filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, there is an overwhelmingly profound sense of thankfulness in our lives.”

Again, Paul is not calling us to be thankful for rebellious children, a divorce, or for a terminal illness. We are not to be thankful for the Devil and his evil plan for the world! Paul is simply reminding us that no matter what happens to our lives, we can find things to be grateful for despite the wrong decisions of others, the wrong directions they might take, or the wrong things they have done against us and others.

What he is saying is that in the midst of everything that we face in life, no matter what it might be, no matter how bad it might be, we can give thanks because God's indwelling Spirit will enable us to have victory, make something new out of our life, and enable us to go on in life and discover God's plan for us. We can give thanks to God for what He is accomplishing in our hearts and lives through the trials we face. We can also give God thanks for His providence over our life, understanding that nothing happens by chance, but only in accordance with His purpose, as He allows certain things to come to pass in our lives that seem hard to bear.

Ephesians 5:20 says something very similar:

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is a sister or companion verse to 1 Thessalonians 5:18. It's saying the same thing. Again, we can be thankful for all things in the sense that God can use all the events of our lives to make us more like His Son, enable us to grow in our Christian, learn to trust Him more, and increase our faith in His providential ways over our life. During everything that we face in life, we can give God thanks, knowing that we can grow through our experience, draw closer to the Lord, and the learn the spiritual lessons He wants to teach us.

Paul is not saying that we should thank God for sinful departures, rebellious ways, and depraved actions that may be part of our lives. No! We do not thank God that we cheated on our wife! We don't thank God that we got drunk, that we committed fornication, that we committed adultery, that we took drugs, that we took His name in vain or talked vulgar. However, we can give thanks "for all things" in the sense that through whatever happens in relation to our lives (good, bad, or indifferent) that God has not forsaken us, that God still loves us, that God wants to change us and give us victory, that God's mercies are new every morning!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 we are told to give thanks "in every thing" and Ephesians 5:20 "for all things." Both are teaching the same thing. No matter what blessings or trials come into our lives we can know that God in His providence has allowed all these events to occur (and maybe even suffers it to be so – Matt. 19:8) because He wants to do a great spiritual work in our heart and life as a result of it.

Romans 8:28 reminds us of this enduring truth:

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."

Not everything is good (it may be wicked, vile, and sinful) but God can use it to work something good in our life. Therefore, since God is sovereign over what He allows to come into our lives (whether directly or indirectly), we can "in every thing" (every circumstance and situation) thank God. I can thank Him for His providence, and I can thank Him for His presence and power as we walk through trials and what I'm learning through the trial. I can thank God for the victory I can have through Christ and how I can triumph over all circumstances, no matter how terrible they might be.

2 Corinthians 2:14 declares:

“Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.”

This has been called by Robert Gromacki an “optimistic outburst.” We can be thankful to God in everything and for every trial that enters our lives because we can experience His victory, help, power, and growth that He wants to give us through Christ. You can grateful and thankful “in ever thing” (1 Thess. 5:18) and “for all things” (Eph. 5:20) because of how God is moving in your life, reshaping your life, and transforming you, making you into the person God wants you to be.

One man said to me. “I thank God for cancer” for it was through cancer that I came to know Christ as my Savior. Of course, the man was not saying he was happy when he developed a terminal cancer but was saying, “Thank You Lord that through cancer I became a Christian.” “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” The Bible is not categorically telling us to be thankful for an automobile accident that ends up crippling someone. However, the Bible is teaching us that “in every thing” (in every test or trial we face through God’s working providence) we can “give thanks” We can say, “Thank You Lord for the good things that will come about because of my trial. Thank You for how you will reshape my life and make me into the person You want me to be.”

Once again, the giving of thanks *in* all things and *for* all things does not imply that all things are inherently good (a divorce, a child with cancer, a son who rebels, a fatal car accident that takes a loved one from us). What it means is that we can give thanks for all things as we view the events or our lives (and the lives of others) from the perspective of God’s providential hand and understanding that nothing happens by chance.

Psalm 115:3

“But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

God does whatever He wants to do with whomsoever He wants to, whenever He wants to. The Bible says that being thankful is the will of God for the Christian when we realize that “every thing” happens for a reason and we can by faith accept God’s

sovereign purpose as coming to pass even when it hurts and we experience crushing blows in life. We can give thanks because of our confidence in the overall purpose and the working of God in our lives. Once again, we can be thankful for “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

We can also give thanks knowing that God is going to do some wonderful things in our own hearts as a result of the trial and difficult situation we are dealing with.

Joseph said in Genesis 50:20

“But as for you (his brothers), ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.”

Genesis 50:20 is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. Yes, it is true. To give thanks for everything means to look past circumstances and know that "all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28) and that God is bringing His purpose to pass for our lives which is greater conformity to Christ. If Romans 8:28 is true (and it is!), then we should be able to praise the Lord at all times, in all circumstances and situations, and in everything, just as long as we give no excuse for our own sin and rebellion against God.

God is sovereign and is over all adversity and all prosperity.

Job 13:15

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.”

The good news is that everything that is allowed into our lives comes either *directly* or *indirectly* from God and is always filtered through His hands of perfect love and infinite wisdom (Col. 2:3'1 Tim. 1:17 – “immortal, invisible, the only wise God”). And so, we can give thanks in everything because God is still on the throne and is in control even when things seem to be out of control in relation to this world, our personal lives, and the lives of others.

Here is an important point. We cannot give thanks to God from the heart unless we are submissive to His sovereign hand in our circumstances, and we believe that He is working even our trials together for our ultimate good.

2 Corinthians 4:15 similarly teaches:

“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”

Because God is interweaving everything together for our good, we can be sure that every event associated with our lives is “for our sakes.” The blessings as well as the blights are “for our sakes.” This is because God wants to grow us, change us, transform our lives, make us into something new and wonderful through the hardships we are passing through.

John Philipps conveys this thought:

“We can complain, worry, or rebel, or we can thank God that He is still on the throne and that He is too wise to make any mistakes, too loving to be unkind, and too powerful to be thwarted in this sublime purpose (Rom. 8:28). He has some wonderful lesson to teach, some glorious purpose to fulfill; and as the catchy little chorus puts it, ‘We’ll understand it better by and by.’”

- ✓ Will you trust Him as you pass through your trial?
- ✓ Will you trust Him when the dark clouds are forming overhead?
- ✓ Will you trust Him when your heart is breaking?
- ✓ Will you trust Him when things don’t turn out the way you planned?

Charles Spurgeon said:

“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”

In everything we can give thanks. This includes the ups and downs of life, the twists and turns, the good times and hard times, the sunshine and rain, in health or in sickness, in the unexpected delays and redirections of life, and even when we experience broken hearts and broken homes. Despite all that is happening with our

lives, we can know that God is somehow still in control for He allows us to pass through specific events and circumstances to change, redirect, and grow us.

Someone wrote these lovely words. Please take them to heart.

“When our vision of God is small
Our problems seem great in size.
Then we must believe the Lord with our all,
And on Him fix our eyes.

As we place our faith in the Lord.
Our worry will decrease.
And when we delight ourselves with His word,
We sense His perfect peace.

Our God in control though pressures burden the soul.
He allows both major and minor
In His perfect harmony.

Yes, our God is in control
Though pressures burden the soul.
His sovereign plan is a symphony which will ring for eternity.”

Years ago, Alan Redpath told an amusing story at the Moody Bible Institute spiritual emphasis conference. A friend of his read the verse, “In every thing give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18) during his morning devotions. He decided to put it into practice. Starting that very morning, he would give thanks in everything. He was leaving Mobile, Alabama, by Greyhound bus that morning for an all-day trip. It was one of those hot and humid summer days, and it was back before air-conditioning was common in buses and cars.

The man arrived at the bus station in good time and secured himself a seat by the window. "Thank You for this window seat, Lord," he said. "It's going to be a hot trip, but at least I can get some breeze." The bus began to fill up. However, the seat next to him remained vacant. He said, "Thank You, Lord. It's going to be a hot trip, but at least I will have some room to spread out." The driver took his place, started the

bus, and closed the door. "Thank You, Lord," the man said again. "You've kept this seat beside me empty."

Just as the bus was about to pull away from the terminal, however, someone banged on the door. It was a late-arriving passenger, a very large woman towing behind her a very small boy. She came aboard, pouring with perspiration and glowing with heat like a furnace. She came down the aisle of the bus, passed a number of empty seats, and flopped heavily down into the seat beside this man. She was quite unable to limit her bulk to the allotted space. The overflow pressed hot and heavy against the dismayed and disappointed man.

Waves of heat and the strong odor of perspiration engulfed him. The woman hauled her little boy upon her lap, and he began to howl and kick his feet. The man received his share of the child's flying feet on his legs. The woman slapped the little boy, but that only made him worse.

By way of consolation, the woman pulled out a pack of cigarettes, lit one, and blew out volumes of smoke in his face that added immeasurably to the man's discomfort. The boy settled down. The cigarette smoldered. The woman fell asleep. As she relaxed, her bulk sagged heavily in the direction of the unfortunate man, who was now pressed so hard against the side of the bus he could hardly breathe. Tentative shoves proved that he was hopelessly trapped. He sat there in growing misery, his temperature rising, his limbs cramped, and his senses assailed with smoke and body odor.

Then he thought of his morning's text: "In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." He said, "Lord, what is there in this situation for which I can be thankful?" He waited. It flashed into his mind: "You can be thankful that you are not married to her!"

We have been studying about being thankful in everything! Yes, we can always be thankful and filled with gratitude toward God. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 once again states: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

On a more serious note, a pastor friend of mine shared with me how a Christian woman was severely burned by a grease fire in her kitchen. It caused her to experience terrible pain and agony. Can she give thanks for the grease fire and her excruciating pain? The simple answer is that she can be thankful (1 Thess. 5:18), not in the sense that she is psychologically happy about what happened or that she is suffering great pain, but in the sense that she can draw upon God's grace, power, promises, and cling to Him for His sufficiency, and that the Lord can teach her to suffer to the glory of God (John 11:4; 1 Pet. 2:20; 5:10).

The same is true regarding other tragic accidents that result in great misery and heartache. Yes, through God's inner work of grace in our hearts, we can be thankful for the worst of tragedies, not tricking our minds into thinking we enjoy and like severe pain, great sorrow, and when we pass through very difficult times, but during our difficulties we can be thankful to God for His promises, presence, power, and patience. We can be thankful to the Lord for what He is doing in our lives from a spiritual perspective and how He is making us more like Jesus.

So, when we say, "I thank God for hitting a deer and demolishing my car" we are not happy about the dead deer or car but that through the trial we can be grateful we were not injured, that the car can be replaced, and the spiritual lessons we learn from the incident. If I say, "I thank God for my severe arthritis, my diagnosis of prostate cancer, or my loss of employment," I am not tricking my mind into thinking that I actually enjoy these trials but that through each trial I can give thanks to God for His spiritual provisions, my consolation and hope in Christ, and His blessed promises to take me through the trials and find the grace to help in the time of need (Heb. 4:16).

So, we can "in every thing give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18) and be "Giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20) that occur in relation to our lives in this sense that God's providence is somehow behind it (1 Pet. 4:19), that God's power and promises are available to help us (2 Pet. 1:3-4), and that His blessed presence is there for us as we pass through the changing seasons of our lives (Heb. 13:6). In short, we may not enjoy passing through the trial, but we can certainly be thankful for the trial because of what God wants to do in us (Phil. 2:13) and how He wants to spiritually

impact the lives of others through our testimony while passing through adversity (James 5:10).

When bad things happen to good people (Christians) we can still possess a spirit of thanksgiving. We may not like the specific trial or tragedy, but we rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4) and give thanks because of His spiritual provisions in our life (2 Pet. 1:3-4), our personal walk and relationship with Him (Phil. 3:10), and His providential ways over our life (Job 13:15).

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the LORD though your testing seems long;
In darkness He gives us a song.
I could not see through the shadows ahead;
So I looked at the cross of my Savior instead.
I bowed to the will of the Master that day;
Then peace came and tears fled away.
Now I can see testing comes from above;
God strengthens His children and purges in love.
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care;
Through purging more fruit I will bear.
O rejoice in the LORD
He makes no mistake,
He knows the end of each path that I take,
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.

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TO BE
THANKFUL FOR

As we finish our second point, we must remember that God expects us to rise triumphant over our circumstances through the spirit of gratitude (“In everything give thanks”). I have a sign in my study which reminds me of this: “There is always something to be thankful for.” As we pass through the trials of life, whether it be a broken relationship, pain, illness, or

financial loss, we don't have to look very long before we can find things for which we are grateful and can express thanksgiving to God.

God wants us to possess an attitude of gratitude. Even in the hour of death we can give thanks for the believer can know that he or she is about to enter into the presence of God!

Psalm 23:6

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

In every trial we face, we can express gratitude. We can give thanks to God for He designs all circumstances for the benefit of the believer. We can be grateful for His perfect plan and supply during the times of adversity. God knows your individual limitations. He knows the proper proportions of adversity that are right for you. We should not concern ourselves with the portion given to someone else. God works in each person's life individually and differently.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"There hath no temptation (*peirasmos - a trial or man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy*) taken you but such as is common to man (*the common nature of trials*): but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able (*the control of God over trials*); but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (*the conquering grace for trials*).

God custom designs the structure of our circumstances by His own divine intervention. God knows the straw that will break the camel's back. He will not allow you to be tempted or tested beyond what you can bear, but He wants a tested product. As we think of God keeping His hand on the thermostat in all of our trials, we have cause to be thankful. "In every thing give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).

Engineers of today's automobiles test drive prototypes so that they know what these cars can tolerate. God wants to test us in order to bring out the best in us! Remember that nothing can come into our lives unless the Lord allows or ordains it. God must put His initials on everything that comes into our state of affairs and

therefore we can “in everything give thanks” knowing that God is somehow watching over what is occurring in our lives. Of course, sometimes we must even give thanks to God through tears, when our heart is crushed and hurting. But just the same, we still give thanks! We give thanks for His providence, power, and peace through adversity.

“God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head.”

The opposite of giving thanks in all things is grumbling or murmuring, an attitude and response that is negative to what is happening in our lives.

Philippians 2:14

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings.”

We must also pass through trials without shaking our fist at God and grumbling about what He has allowed to happen to our lives.

Someone said:

‘Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.’

Instead of murmuring and complaining - God wants us to be praising and thanking! Yes, even when things are not going as we expected. When things are difficult and the trials are heavy we can still find room to give thanks to God for what He is doing in our hearts as we pass through our trials and the lessons He wants us to learn through our testing.

An anonymous person wrote this poem:

"In Everything Give Thanks!"

"Mid sunshine, cloud or stormy days,
When hope abounds or care dismays,
When trials press and toils increase
Let not thy faith in God decrease—
'In every thing give thanks.'

All things we know shall work for good,
Nor would we change them if we could;
'Tis well if only He command;
His promises will ever stand—
'In every thing give thanks.'

He satisfies the longing heart,
He thwarts the tempter's cruel dart,
With goodness fills the hungry soul,
And helps us sing when billows roll.
'In every thing give thanks.'"

—Selected

"In every thing give thanks." Thankfulness should be imbedded in every area of our lives. In fact, being thankful is an important part of the marriage relationship. Marriage counselors tell us that "taking each other for granted" is one of the chief causes of marital problems. Being thankful to God for each other is a secret of a happy home, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the grace of thankfulness! If we cultivate a thankful heart in our marriage we will discover healing, blessing, and beauty in our relationship.

III. The reason for thanksgiving – "for this is the will of God"

Paul's statement concerning God's will for our lives is attached to the previous commands in this passage. It is God's will that all those who are in Christ Jesus should express constant joy (1 Thess. 5:16), constant prayer (1 Thess. 5:17), and

constant thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5: 18). We are to give thanks in everything because it is the will of God for our lives.

There is no need for searching further, to attend seminars, read books, or throwing "fleeces" out to God as Gideon did to find out what the Lord wants us to do. Being thankful is God's will for our lives. Being thankful despite what happens to us or what we pass through is what God expects from our hearts and lives. This simple and direct statement does not allow any believer to create excuses to be ungrateful. You cannot say, "You don't know what happened to me." "You cannot understand." "You have not gone through what I have passed through." "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen!"

Despite the negative attitudes of many Christians, God's will is always for the the believer to be thankful in every circumstance because:

- ✓ you can know that God has allowed it (either directly or indirectly)
- ✓ that He will teach you the lessons you need to learn through it,
- ✓ give you the strength and victory when facing it,
- ✓ and help you grow and become a more fruitful, faithful, and beautiful Christian because of it.

Thankfulness is the will of God and should always characterize the Christian as he says to himself, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits' (Psalm 103:2). Even a grumpy old man like Jeremiah recognized the truth that the Lord's compassions never fail, they are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Have you been practicing the will of God for your life? Have you been giving thanks no matter what life might throw at you? Are you grateful during your afflictions or difficulties? During your trial and when life seemingly serves you a sour lemon, can you and will you practice God's will? Will you be thankful to God? There is always something to be thankful for in the midst of your trial.

C. H. Spurgeon correctly observes:

"The heart must be alive with gracious gratitude, or the leaf cannot long be green with living holiness."

Spurgeon elsewhere admits that "I have not always found it easy to practice this duty; this I confess to my shame. When suffering extreme pain some time ago, a brother in Christ said to me, 'Have you thanked God for this?' I replied that I desired to be patient, and would be thankful to recover. 'But,' said he, 'in everything give thanks, not after it is over, but while you are still in it, and perhaps when you are enabled to give thanks for the severe pain, it will cease.'"

Of course, even if the pain doesn't cease, our heart can still assume a proper perspective on pain and give praise and thanksgiving to God for His perfect plan to make us more like His Son and grow and mature us in our Christian life.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

IV. The ability to express thanksgiving – "in Christ Jesus"

Paul now tells us that we can express gratitude because of our relationship we have with Christ Who is working gratitude and thanksgiving in our heart. Being unthankful is the essence of the unregenerate heart. Ingratitude is one of the features of pagan depravity.

Romans 1:21

"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful (*for who God is and what He has done*); but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

The apostle Paul identified unbelievers as being characteristically ungrateful. But when God regenerates an individual, He produces a new heart that longs to obey God's command to give thanks to Him. To be unthankful is to live like unbelievers – atheists and other God-defying people.

The prepositional phrase "in Christ Jesus" is seen all throughout the New Testament. This speaks of our union with Jesus Christ in our everyday living. We share Christ's life. This means that it's only in union with Him that a life of thanksgiving is possible for the believer. It is through our spiritual union with Christ

that we can possess an inward transformation and part of this transformation experience is a thankful heart.

Colossians 2:7 explains it like this:

“Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

How deep are your roots? The deeper we are rooted in Christ (His life, virtues, power, sufficiency) the deeper we will go in our Christian life. It’s our deepening walk and relationship with Christ allows us to possess a grateful heart during hard times.

“Into the heart of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Seeking to know the reason
Why He should love me so -
Why He should stoop to lift me
Up from the miry clay,
Saving my soul, making me whole,
Tho I had wandered away.

Into the will of Jesus,
Deeper and deeper I go,
Praying for grace to follow,
Seeking His way to know;
Bowing in full surrender
Low at His blessed feet,
Bidding Him take, break me and make,
Till I am molded and meet.

Into the joy of Jesus
Deeper and deeper I go,
Rising, with soul enraptured,
Far from the world below;
Joy in the place of sorrow,
Peace in the midst of pain,

Jesus will give, Jesus will give -
He will uphold and sustain.”

Thanksgiving is the product of the new life received from Christ and thanksgiving comes alive in our hearts by Christ working in our hearts to produce a spirit of gratitude.

This command to be thankful no matter what happens is possible only by God's grace operating in our hearts to sanctify us and make us into what we ought to be. Some will remark, “Really Paul, this is not humanly possible! To be thankful for everything that comes into our life!” Paul would probably reply, "You're right. It's not. It's only supernaturally possible!"

Someone said:

It's Impossible! But it is...Him-possible!

We can be grateful in everything for we are in Christ Jesus, sharing His life, values, virtues, and strength and power. God not only mandates the expressions of righteousness (rejoicing, praying and thanking – 1 Thess. 5:16-18), but He makes it possible for believers to accomplish these commands in every circumstance. How can we be thankful to God when we lose a loved one? How can we be thankful to God when everything seems to be going against us? How can we be thankful to God when we are sick, hurting, and short on money?

Philippians 2:13 tells us how:

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.”

The idea behind “worketh” (energeo) which means to communicate energy, produce an effect, or demonstrate power in action. God is working “in you” to bring about His will for your life. This is the secret of New Covenant Christianity. God energizes us to do His will which includes being thankful.

First, He gives us the DESIRE to do His will (“both to will”). Our will needs to be impacted by grace if we are going to give thanks during trials and difficulties. The

Lord urges us to follow His will as He works on our hearts, softens us, and directs us in the right paths.

Second, God grants us the POWER to do our spiritual tasks whatever they might be ("to do of his good pleasure"). So we have the complete package in Christ – the transformation of our will and the supply of power.

The old saying is true:

"The will of God will never lead where the grace of God cannot keep you.

And what is God's will? "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). The only way we can learn to be thankful to God in every circumstance is by the supernatural work of God taking place in our hearts. And God is working in our hearts to produce a continual life of thanksgiving and gratitude for the past, present, future, for the blessings, trials, and hurts. When we view everything through the grid of God's sovereignty, we will have room for praise!

We should not be surprised to see the attitude of gratitude associated with a Spirit filled (controlled, enabled) saint. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul lists one of the "indicators" of Spirit filling.

Ephesians 5:18

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess (*don't allow alcohol to control you*); but be filled with the Spirit (*allow the Holy Spirit to control you*); Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, the only way we can give thanks for everything (no exceptions) is by the work of God the Holy Spirit taking place in our hearts. The Holy Spirit working in our hearts in a supernatural way can produce thanksgiving. Christ through the Spirit's abiding ministry makes thanksgiving possible.

Our intellect and irrational thinking say, "get upset and complain." But the Spirit says, "give thanks in all things and at all times." If we respond to the Spirit work in

our hearts by faith, we will conclude that “God allowed our trial and He will cause it to work out for my good.” As a result, we will genuinely give thanks, not some kind of legalistically compliance but a Spirit enabled heart of gratitude and praise to God for the work He is doing in our hearts and the transformation that is occurring in our lives through the trials we face in life.

V. The personal reminder of thanksgiving - “concerning you”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

The added phrase “concerning you” or “for you” assures you and me today that this aspect of God's will (giving thanks in everything) can have specific application to our own personal lives. This means that certain trials are tailor made for you so that you can learn through them, pass through them, and give God thanks in the midst of them. The phrase “concerning you” is the Greek preposition “eis” and literally means “into, unto, towards you” and gives us the understanding that this truth about thanksgiving must get into our hearts and become operative and applicable to each one of us as God works within our inner being.

- ✓ Have you been allowing a thankful spirit to be part of your daily life?
- ✓ Is it your practice to thank God for the specific trials related to your life?
- ✓ Do you thank Him for what the trials can do in your heart and life and the new perspective they can bring?
- ✓ Have you been neglecting the expression of thanksgiving to God?
- ✓ Have you been passing through a barren time in your life where your heart has not been grateful to God?

There is an Old Testament example of someone who was thankful in the midst of great suffering and loss. His name was Job. He lost his money, his children, and his health. His wife told him to curse God and die! And yet, Job blessed the name of God in spite of his personal tragedies. Nothing speaks more powerfully of a walk with God than continuous thankfulness.

I use Job's expression of thanks at every graveside service that I do for it is very appropriate for believers in Christ. In Job 1:21 the patriarch realized God's sovereignty over his life when declaring these words: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Blessed be the name of the Lord! Thank you, God! "In every thing give thanks!" Whether God gives or takes away He is still to be praised! We owe everything to God and everything He has given to us or takes from us should provoke praise unto Him!

- Gratitude is a "thermometer" that indicates the state of your spiritual health.
- Gratitude is a "medicine" that promotes your spiritual health.

An attitude of gratitude is a wonderful weapon against unbelief, disobedience, a hard heart, and a bitter spirit!

Corrie ten Boom in *The Hiding Place* relates an incident that taught her always to be thankful. She and her sister, Betsy, had just been transferred to the worst German prison camp they had ever seen. It was at Ravensbruck. On entering the barracks, they found them extremely overcrowded and flea-infested.

That morning, their Scripture reading in 1 Thessalonians had reminded them to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances even though evil people brought them about. Betsy told Corrie to stop and thank the Lord for every detail of their new living quarters. Corrie at first flatly refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted, and Corrie finally succumbed to her pleadings.

During the months spent at that camp, they were surprised to find how openly they could hold Bible study and prayer meetings without interference from the guards. It was not until several months later that they learned the reason the guards would not enter the barracks. It was because of the fleas. Beloved, we may not see it at first, but God may use our discomfort as a source of blessing to us and others.

Yes, we can be thankful for the fleas (our trials) because through them God can change our hearts and help us to obtain greater growth and sanctification in our lives.

1 Peter 5:10

“But the God of all grace (*saving and sanctifying grace*), who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect (*God shapes us* – *renders us fit and equipped*), stablish (*God stabilizes us* - *makes stable and firm in both living and our belief system*), strengthen (*God sustains us*), settle you (*God settles us* - *He makes us firmly established on a sure and unchanging foundation*).”

For this reason, we can “In every thing give thanks.” It is certain that no matter what occurs in our lives, the big and small events, the happy times and heartaches, or the blessings and battering’s, we can give thanks to God for the transforming work He is doing in our hearts and lives on a daily basis (2 Cor. 3:18).

“Thank you, Lord,
For the trials that come my way.
In that way I can grow each day
As I let you lead,
And thank you, Lord,
For the patience those trials bring.
In that process of growing,
I can learn to care.

I thank you, Lord,
For the victory that growing brings.
In surrender of everything
Life is so worth while.
And I thank you, Lord,
That when everything's put in place,
Out in front I can see your face,
And it's there you belong.”

Gratefulness does a number of things for you and other people.

- It will help you to not become bitter at bad things that happen.
- It will encourage the people that you thank.
- It will keep your heart tender toward the Lord as you count the blessings you have received from Him.
- It will help you to recognize God's care and control over your life, as you face trials.

One of God's faithful missionaries, Allen Gardiner, experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the Savior. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me."

In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God."

Think of that! No word of complaint, no childish whining, no grumbling at the circumstances—just praise and thanksgiving for God's goodness.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Yes, we can give thanks for all things and in all circumstances for in the grand scheme of things, through God's providence, He has allowed it, and because of the transforming work being done in our hearts and lives, we can say, "Thank you Lord." The old hymn summarizes our gratefulness to God for everything that occurs in our lives.

"Thanks to God for my Redeemer,
Thanks for all Thou dost provide!
Thanks for times now but a mem'ry,
Thanks for Jesus by my side!

Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime,
Thanks for dark and stormy fall!
Thanks for tears by now forgotten,
Thanks for peace within my soul!

Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered,
Thanks for what Thou dost deny!
Thanks for storms that I have weathered,
Thanks for all Thou dost supply!

Thanks for pain, and thanks for pleasure,
Thanks for comfort in despair!
Thanks for grace that none can measure,
Thanks for love beyond compare!

Thanks for roses by the wayside,
Thanks for thorns their stems contain!
Thanks for home and thanks for fireside,
Thanks for hope, that sweet refrain!

Thanks for joy and thanks for sorrow,
Thanks for heav'nly peace with Thee!
Thanks for hope in the tomorrow,
Thanks through all eternity!"