

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

October 9, 2022



SCRIPTURE

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

COMMENTARY

5:16. Paul admonished, Be joyful always. This is short and to the point. The key, however, is the word always. Paul meant this literally. Christian joy is not bound by circumstances or hindered by difficulties. In fact, joy in the New Testament is often coupled with sorrow or suffering. The Thessalonian believers had already experienced this strange duet, like an inspiring song played in minor key (1 Thess. 1:6). When the sorrow or suffering results from being identified with Christ, the Holy Spirit creates a supernatural joy—a wellness of soul that cannot be dampened by adverse situations. The explanation may be found in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

5:17. The next staccato note follows: pray continually. This means never stop praying. Paul was a busy missionary, and he wrote about the Christian's duty to fulfill daily responsibilities, so this is not a command about speaking non-stop prayers. It refers, however, to the attitude of prayer, or reverence before God. The Christian's life of righteousness and his approach to relationships and responsibilities should be such that he maintains a constant attitude of being in God's presence. Such a person will pray often and about many things, including requests, praise, and thanksgiving. This command also means that we should never quit praying.

5:18. The next command requires trust in the sovereignty of Christ: give thanks in all circumstances. It recognizes God's eminence in all events. A thankful spirit does not come naturally to most of us. Certainly it pushes us beyond our natural capacities when difficult or painful situations invade our life. This command to be thankful, no matter what happens, is possible only by God's grace. When we can agree with God that he works all things out for good to those who love him and are committed to obedience (Rom. 8:28), then we can thank him.



5:19. This verse is a caution against dousing water on the fire of God’s Spirit: Do not put out the Spirit fire. This can happen in any heart when the Holy Spirit is stifled, allowing thoughts or actions which are contrary to the character or practices of God. The fire of the Spirit is suppressed when he is rejected, when his convicting power, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11) are ignored. We douse the Spirit’s influence in our life through doubt, we drench him with anger, we drown his power with immorality. The Holy Spirit himself cannot be put out. He is God. We can, however, stifle his work in our life. We quench the Spirit, or grieve him, when we do not reach for those attitudes and graces which are peculiarly His—love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:22–23). The Spirit’s fire is quenched when His presence is ignored or His guidance and conviction in our hearts are suppressed and rejected.

5:20. Paul declared, Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Others have translated this verse, “Despise not prophecies.” This is a present tense verb, addressed to “you” (plural), and therefore intended for the entire church.

5:21–22. Paul advised the Thessalonians to test everything. The word everything is universal; it leaves nothing free from examination by spiritual standards and understanding. Paul did not explain how to carry out this testing. But certainly the fire of the Spirit (His convicting, guidance, and illumination), the instructions from the apostles and missionaries, and the written revelation of God are the lenses through which we must scrutinize everything. The clear purpose of this testing was to hold on to the good, and to avoid every kind of evil. The good has its origin in God; evil is a distortion of that good. Evil is twisting and destructive. We must not flirt with evil

MAIN POINT

It is God’s will that you be thankful and prayerful in every situation.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Introduction

What are some situations in life where people wonder what God’s will for them is?

Is it possible to know God’s will for your life? Explain.

What are some things you can know God wants for your life?

When thinking about where to go to college, who to marry, what career to pursue, or what job to take, the will of God can seem like a mystery to us. We often fixate on those questions. However, God never changes. His Word teaches us that His will is not some



great mystery we must solve; rather, our priority should simply be understanding and trusting in who He is. When we make knowing Him our focus, He'll lead us into His kingdom purposes no matter who we're with, where we live, or what we're doing.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18.

How is it possible to rejoice always? Is this something you could cultivate on your own? Why or why not?

Why are rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks “God’s will for you in Christ”?

What is encouraging about knowing this to be God’s will for you in any situation or context?

Rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks are three things we are to always do, no matter our circumstances. These commands further demonstrate the gospel’s unshakable truth and God’s unwavering love—things that aren’t subject to or limited by our circumstances. We will always have something to rejoice in, pray about, and to be thankful for. Therefore, we can always obey these tasks because of what God has done in us through Christ.

What comes to mind when you see the phrase “pray constantly” in verse 17? Do you feel more overwhelmed or encouraged? Why?

Commands indicate that something is non-negotiable. By exhorting the Thessalonian believers to pray constantly, the apostle Paul demonstrated a conviction that prayer is of utmost importance to God, a practice that He requires of His people. God gives His people commands as a gracious and sobering call to participate in His mission to make His glory known throughout the world, the most important task conceivable.

How do these verses reinforce that prayer should be a regular habit for believers, not something done only during worship services and small-group meetings?

Just as we are to seek the good for one another (v. 15), rejoice always (v. 16), and give thanks in all things (v. 18), we are to cultivate prayer as an ongoing and intentional practice. Paul’s exhortations in this passage were not limited strictly to what we normally do during a worship service or Bible study.

How do the commands to rejoice and give thanks help you gain a better understanding of the role of prayer in the Christian life?



How is prayer connected to our ability to always rejoice and give thanks?

To pursue these prescribed attitudes and actions, we must be reliant on prayer, asking God to give us the strength and patience to obey Him. To help others by warning, comforting, and showing them patience (v. 14), we need to intercede on their behalf, praying that God will change them and shape their character to align with His character and will.

How is prayer different from the other practices that Paul called his readers to do? How is it similar?

Prayer is a means through which God extends His grace to us. Just as He shapes us in particular ways through obeying other commandments, He also shapes us in a particular way through praying. Following God's commands leads toward multiple areas of life being sanctified.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22.

In reading these verses (and much of the New Testament), we must remember that the Christian faith was still developing when this was written. People were still making sense of things that we now take for granted. Things like an incomplete canon of Scripture and the activity of itinerant teachers created a setting conducive to conflict. The church struggled to know which leader to follow, which prophet was true, and which was false. Disagreements over doctrine and ethics seemed inevitable.

What does it mean to “stifle the Spirit”? “Despise prophecies”?

Paul wrote that we should “test all things.” How do we do that?

What are the good things we should hold onto?

Is it possible to “stay away from every kind of evil”? What exactly was Paul instructing here?

The word “everything” is universal; it leaves nothing free from examination by spiritual standards and understanding. Paul did not explain how to carry out this testing. But certainly, the fire of the Spirit (His convicting, guidance, and illumination), the instructions from the apostles and missionaries, and the written revelation of God are the lenses through which we must scrutinize everything. The clear purpose of this testing was to hold on to the good, and to avoid every kind of evil. The good has its origin in God; evil is a distortion of that good. Evil is twisting and destructive. We must not flirt with evil. Churches that do cannot encourage and build one another up—only tear one another down.



APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Based on today's passage, what is God's will for your life?

Which of the behaviors listed represents a strength in your life? Which is an area of weakness? How can you improve the weak area(s)?

What can we do to make sure our prayers focus on God's purposes and priorities?

How would your life change this week if you were to be thankful and prayerful in all circumstances?

PRAYER

Thank God for who He is, what He's done, and what He's doing now in your life and in the world around you. Thank Him for making His will for your life clear. Ask the Father to help you step into His will so that you might help advance His Son's kingdom on earth. Pray in the Holy Spirit for His will to be done in the lives of others.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians.

October 16, 2022 --- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

