

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

October 9, 2022



INTRODUCTION

Name two or three areas of life where you wonder about God's will for your future (i.e. where you should go to college, what career path you should take, who to marry, etc.).

Do you wish God would tell you His will about those things now? Why or why not?

Would knowing God's plans in those areas change your life today? If not, why not? If so, how?

What are some things you do know that God wants for your life? How do you know that?

It can be overwhelming to think about all your choices in life. Do you ever worry you might get it wrong? Like, what if God wants you to go to college right after high school and you decide to take a year off, instead? What if you marry the wrong person? Does God have one career in mind for you? The will of God can seem like a mystery, to the point that we worry about it. But there is good news. God never changes. That means that His will is not some great mystery we have to figure out. Instead, He wants us to focus on understanding Him and trusting in who He is. When we make knowing Him our focus, He'll lead us no matter who we're with, where we live, or what we're doing.

DISCUSSION

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

Why does God want you to always rejoice, pray, and give thanks?

What is hard about those commands?

How does knowing that God wants you to always rejoice, pray, and give thanks make you feel—hopeless, encouraged, overwhelmed, stressed, or

something else? Explain.

Whether you think your life is great or terrible, God says to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. In fact, these commands prove the point that God doesn't change. It's not about your circumstances; it's about who God is. And He isn't ever limited by your circumstances. He loves you and keeps His promises no matter what is going on in your life. Because of who He is and what He has done in you through Christ, you always have something to rejoice in, pray about, and to be thankful for.

What does the commanding language Paul used here tell you about being joyful, praying and giving thanks? Is it an option to be joyful, pray, and give thanks? Explain.

Commands indicate that something is non-negotiable. By instructing us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks constantly, Paul shows us that these are practices God requires of His people. God gives us commands so that we can participate in making His glory known throughout the world.

Is prayer something you do: only at church, before meals with the family, or regularly in many different contexts?

Do you pray on your own or only when someone else leads? Why?

How do the commands to “rejoice always” and “give thanks in all circumstances” challenge your current practice of prayer?

Do you regularly pray with joy and thanks or are your prayers mostly about the needs you have that stress you out? Explain.

Prayer is a way God gives you grace. He shapes you in particular ways through obeying other commandments, and He also shapes you in a particular way through praying. Following God's commands leads to spiritual growth in many areas of life.

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

At the time 1 Thessalonians was written, the church was still very new. Believers struggled to know which leader to follow, which prophet was true, and which was false. As a result, disagreements came easily.

“Stifle the Spirit” isn't a phrase we use these days. What did Paul mean by that?

What about “despise prophecies”? What does that mean?

Paul wrote that we should “test all things.” Give an example of something we, as believers in Christ, should “test”. What would it look like to “test” that in the way Paul meant here?

What are the good things we should hold onto?

Is it possible to “stay away from every kind of evil”? What did Paul mean by that?

The word everything literally means everything! There is absolutely nothing we shouldn't consider next to the truth of God's Word—no matter what your friends tell you or how they live. Paul did not explain how to carry out this testing. But the Spirit's conviction and guidance and the Word of God are the lenses through which we must examine everything. Why? So we can hold on to what is good and avoid every kind of evil. We want to avoid evil because evil is destructive. We shouldn't mess around with it! And that's not just in our individual lives, either—churches and student ministries that do not encourage and build one another up only tear one another down.

GOING DEEPER

 **Read John 15:7.**

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

What are some steps you can take this week to be thankful and prayerful in all circumstances?

APPLICATION

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

Which of the behaviors listed represents an area of strength in your life?

Which is an area of weakness? How can you improve the weak area(s)?

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 your life and 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:

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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 the mall.”

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.