"Always Thankful"
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
Fractured: How God Restores a Broken Church
Pastor Paul Bartelme
New Vintage Church, West Allis

It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you "be of good cheer"
It's the most wonderful time of the year

It's the hap-happiest season of all
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings when friends come to call
It's the hap-happiest season of all

Writers: George Wyle, Eddie Pola

Is it not the most wonderful time of the year? Gathering with family and friends, enjoying a beautiful dinner, and especially taking the time to reflect on everything we're thankful for.

For many, though… the holidays can be a _____ season to endure. Financial hardship, remembering a loved one who passed, toxic familial relationships, and so on.



This leads me to the following question: *What happens when life isn't presently giving you much to be thankful for?*

_____? How do you give thanks when…

- □ … you've just lost your job and don't know how you're going to pay the bills?
- □ … your marriage is falling apart and you wonder if you'll be together next holiday season?
- □ … someone you love is no longer sitting at the Thanksgiving table?
- □ … the doctor gives you a diagnosis you never expected, and now your future is uncertain?
- □ … you're living paycheck-to-paycheck, and you can barely afford groceries?
- □ … you're surrounded by people for the holidays, yet you never felt so alone?
- □ … your body is wearing out and losing strength? And you can no longer do the things you once enjoyed?

And yet… the Apostle Paul wrote something in our main passage that, at times, can seem impossible.

Prior to exploring our main passage… let's think about what's at stake when our circumstances _____ us of gratitude:

- Our joy could disappear … We could feel distant from God … We could become blind to all of the little blessings … Our relationships could become strained …

Here's what I'm building up to, in two really important points:

- When our gratitude depends on our _____, so do our joy, peace, hope, and relationships too – both with God and others.

- It's not wrong to experience sorrow, disappointment, or discouragement. *These are things to _____ and navigate through. And then, when the time is appropriate, you need to move on.*

"But how? How to move on, Pastor?" Let's explore our main passage and find out. We're in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

1. **V 16…** THE KEY WORD IS _____. REJOICE ALWAYS.
    - *The big takeaway:* Joy is rooted in your relationship with Jesus, not your circumstances (Hab 3:17-18).
    - *But why should you rejoice?* So you can grow into maturity (Jas 1:2-4) and because your heavenly Father favors you (Rom 8:28).

2. **V 17…** THE KEY WORD IS _____. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING, REGARDLESS.
    - *The big takeaway:* When circumstances become overwhelming, your connection with God must remain intact (Psa 66:18-20).
    - *But why should you pray?* Because your heavenly Father cares for you (1 Pet 5:7) and because you can not live without His peace, which guards you (Phil 4:6-7).

3. **V 18…** THE KEY WORD IS _____. GIVE THANKS ALL THE TIME.
    - *The big takeaway:* You don't give thanks *for* the dire circumstances, but rather in the midst of.
    - *But why should you give thanks?* Because your heavenly Father is always good (Psa 100:5) and because remembering His blessings keeps you from losing sight of His faithfulness (Psa 103:2-5; 68:19).

Regardless of your circumstances, rejoice in the Lord, remain connected to Him through prayer, and never lose sight of His goodness. By doing so, you can't help but to have a heart overflowing with thanksgiving.

CALLS-TO-ACTION

1. **Rejoice:** Tonight, identify three attributes of God in Scripture and praise Him for each.
2. **Pray:** Every morning this week, identify three worries and bring them to God in prayer.
3. **Remember:** Read Psalm 100:5 every day this week, remembering God's unchanging goodness.
4. **Give Thanks:** Before bed each night, thank God for three specific blessings.
5. **Encourage:** Before Thanksgiving, contact someone who's struggling and remind them of God's faithfulness.

GOING DEEPER

Go through this note sheet with your Growth Group and/or your family at the dinner table. Bring this note sheet to your work or school and discuss it with someone over lunch. Read the main passage and look up all of the supporting verses. Pray with one another.

1. How specifically have difficult circumstances affected your joy, peace, gratitude, and relationships?
2. How exactly can you rejoice in the Lord when your circumstances give you little reason to rejoice?
3. What keeps you from turning to God in prayer when life becomes overwhelming?
4. How can you acknowledge life's difficulties while remaining thankful for God's goodness?
5. What practical changes can you make to rejoice, pray, and give thanks more consistently?