

Intro Message Slide 1: Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

When you hear these words of the Apostle Paul, they sound good, and they sound right, and they sound biblical, and they sound Christian, and they sound beautiful, and they are.

But when you hear them, you may be tempted to tack a **“but”** onto the end of that sentence.

It does sound beautiful, and it does sound good, and it does sound right, and it does sound Christian, and it does sound spiritual, **but** is it practical?

It has a really nice ring to it at Thanksgiving to say that we ought to give thanks in everything doesn't it?

Slide 2: So right up front, let me say, this is a profoundly difficult thing that Paul is asking us to do.

Thanksgiving in a certain way is easy to do when blessings are **falling around** our ears, but it can be very difficult to do when it seems that trials are **falling down around** our ears,

Still in those things Paul wants us to give thanks, and to see three things that he is particularly saying to us in this one little verse—this tiny, but difficult and beautiful directive that he's giving.

Slide 3: What Believers Need to Do

The first thing that Paul is telling us is **what believers need to do**. **“In everything give thanks.”**

Then he tells us **why we need to do it**. **“For this is the will of God for you.”**

And then, having given us a direction that no one can keep in his own strength, **he says how to do it—“In Christ Jesus.”**

Slide 4: Image In Everything Give Thanks

First of all, this direction, *“In everything give thanks,”* **Paul is telling us what we are to do**. That in every circumstance of life we are to be thankful.

I want to pause right here and say, notice what Paul does not say. He does not say, **“for”** everything give thanks. He says, **“in”** everything give thanks.

Slide 5: *“Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

There is nothing unusual in that verse, except perhaps the words **“in everything.”** **Boy, does that get our attention!**

Slide 6: Eeyore Image **We've all been around grumpy people who seem perpetually unhappy.** They fuss, and they gripe about this or that. Nothing suits them, everything bothers them, and they can't be happy because they won't be happy.

Slide 7: Misery Loves Company

And since misery loves company, they want us to wallow with them in their pool of discontentment.

That's why this verse is such a challenge.

It reminds me of Mark Twain's famous comment, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. **It's the parts I do understand.**"

That certainly applies to 1 Thessalonians 5:18. There's nothing tricky, vague, or unclear about it.

So we're back to the hard part again. **How do you give thanks "in everything"?** Let's pause over the last two words: "*in Christ.*"

Slide 8: This is God's will for you - "in Christ."

This speaks to the reality of supernatural conversion. If you are "*in Christ,*" you play for a new team, wear a new uniform, and follow new rules. **Jesus changes everything!**

I'm old enough to have seen non-Christian people look at life differently than professing believers.

That's not just a religious cliché. **It's the bottom-line truth about life.** Non-Christian people don't see God's hand in everything because they can't see it.

Slide 9: Image Lucky That's why they hang up somewhere a four-leaf clover, a rabbit's foot, or a picture of some long-dead saint. In an impersonal universe, things just "**happen,**" so if the rabbit's foot brings you good luck, why not hang it on your rear-view mirror?

But the Christian thinks differently. A. W. Tozer explains the difference this way:

A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for one whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another.

The man who has met God is not looking for anything, empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest; and happiest when he feels the worst.

He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge.

Tozer then adds this description:

The man who has met God is not looking for anything; he has found it. He is not searching for light, for upon him the light has already shined. (The Root of Righteousness)

If a person is "in Christ," he believes in something the world can't see and doesn't understand.

Slide 10 Seeing Image The world says, "**seeing is believing,**" but the Christian position is quite different. We say, "**believing is seeing.**"

"Once I was blind, but now I see."

So how does this apply to 1 Thessalonians 5:18?

If you are “*in Christ*,” you see things differently.

You evaluate every experience of life through the vision of the crucified and risen Son of God.

That’s why the person “*in Christ*” can give thanks “*in everything*.”

You see something others do not see.

Let’s take a closer look at the text in three different versions:

“Be thankful, whatever the circumstances may be” (Phillips).

“Be thankful in all circumstances” (NLT).

“No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (TLB).

I like that third one because of the phrase “*no matter what happens*.”

Because things happen to us we didn’t expect.

No one knows what tomorrow may bring.

That’s why the instruction “*no matter what happens*” helps us.

It may be good, or it may be bad.

Find a way to give thanks anyway.

That’s what Paul is telling us to do.

It’s right and good to “praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

Slide 11: We shouldn’t take our blessings for granted or think we somehow deserve them.

But how? How do we give thanks when the diagnosis is terminal, when the marriage is ending, when the child is prodigal, when the job is lost, when the loneliness is crushing?

Paul isn’t asking us to manufacture feelings we don’t have or to engage in toxic positivity. He’s inviting us into a different way of seeing.

Think of it this way: gratitude is the language of trust. When we give thanks in the valley, we’re declaring that God is still God even when we can’t see the path forward. We’re saying that His purposes are good even when our experience is bitter. We’re testifying that He is with us even when He feels absent.

This is the gratitude that transforms us. Gratitude for obvious blessings requires little faith. But thanksgiving in the darkness creates space for God to work in ways that prosperity never can.

Thanksgiving in difficulty requires us to look past our circumstances to Christ.

Slide 12: Plane Window Image Often on my flight back home from Vancouver after a FEB board meeting, as we flew above the clouds, I could see the sun shining brightly, yet on the ground, no one could see the sun because of the thick cloud bank.

Slide 13: When the Clouds Hide the Sun

Sometimes the clouds of life seem to obscure the face of our Father, and we think He has abandoned us. But above those dark clouds, the sun of His love shines forever.

Try as we might, we cannot trace God's hand in every circumstance, because He paints on a canvas much larger than our tiny vision. Things often happen that make no sense.

So how do we give thanks when our hearts are broken? How do we give thanks when we are confused? How do we give thanks when we see what sin has done in the world?

Slide 14: We Can Give Thanks Because We Know . . .

The Bible has a whole catalog of things for which we ought to give thanks.

That God is sovereign.

That nothing happens by chance.

That all things work together for good to those who love God.

That hard times show us our total need for God.

That God's grace is sufficient!

That God has triumphed over sin and death through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That God uses the worst that happens to promote our spiritual growth.

That God is faithful even when we are faithless.

That God's Word will be vindicated.

That God's promises are true.

That evil will not reign forever.

That heaven is real.

That His grace is sufficient for every situation.

That nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

That our salvation rests on God and not on us.

That there is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still.

That the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin.

That God delights to save sinners.

That the Lord can soften the hardest heart.

That there are no impossible cases with God.

That even when we feel alone, we are never alone.

That the Holy Spirit abides with us always.

That the Holy Spirit prays for us when we are too weak to pray for ourselves.

That the Lord Jesus feels our pain.

That someday we will be conformed to the image of Christ.

That God is faithful to finish His work in us.

That our hardships equip us to minister to others.

That we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace.

That we are still God's children even when our faith falters.

I have lived long enough to know that there is a story behind every smiling face. Even the happiest people know their share of sorrow. And some people seem to receive far more than their share of pain.

When we factor God into the equation, when we rest upon the rock of His sovereignty, then and only then do we have the grounds for saying **“Thank you Lord,”** no matter what happens around us.

Not for a second do I suggest this is easy.

When we proclaim that God's wisdom is greater than ours by giving thanks when we don't feel like it, that simple act of giving thanks is a testimony worth more than 10,000 words.

Slide 15: Note One Final Detail in Summary from the Text: “This Is God's Will.”

In closing to summarize our text for Thanksgiving.

What is God's will? To see God everywhere and in everything and to thank him *“no matter what happens.”* This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

When we hear **“God's will,”** we often think of big decisions — Which job should I take? Whom should I marry? Where should I live?

But in this passage, Paul isn't talking about those kinds of choices.

He's talking about the way He desires His people to live day by day.

Paul is saying, "It is the will of God for you that you give thanks in everything," indicating to us that it is God's grand design to create a joyful, rejoicing people.

His purpose is not to create ungrateful, grudging, miserly people.

Paul doesn't say, "Give thanks when things make sense" or "Give thanks when you feel like it" or "Give thanks after you've had time to process."

He says, "in everything." In the inexplicable, in the disappointing, in the devastating. And then he adds this stunning phrase: *"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."*

The world gives thanks when life is good.

The believer gives thanks because God is good — even when life isn't.

Of all the things that might constitute God's will for our lives — here it is stated plainly: **gratitude.**

Not circumstantial thankfulness that ebbs and flows with our fortunes, but a foundational posture of thanksgiving that persists regardless of conditions.

To Be "In Christ Jesus" Changes Everything.

Above all, we give thanks for Jesus—God's indescribable gift. Thanks be to God for the saving grace of Christ, who bore our sins, and opened the way to eternal life.

We thank Him not only for blessings seen, but for the mercy that met us in our brokenness, the cross that covered our shame, and the resurrection that secured our hope.

In every season, in every sorrow, in every joy—**we give thanks for Jesus, our Redeemer, our Shepherd, our King.**

For through Him, we are not just forgiven, we are made new. Thanks be to God for salvation full and free, for grace that never runs dry, and for love that will never let us go.

This should be our greatest thanks and the message to proclaim today.

Slide 16 and 17 Image: No matter what happens, we can always say, "Praise the Lord Anyhow!"

This morning, as we prepare to count our blessings and celebrate thanksgiving, may the Lord give us grace to give thanks in everything — not just for health, but in the hospital room? Not just when prayers are answered, but when heaven seems silent?

Slide 18 Prayer: Lord, you have given us so much. **Give us one thing more—grateful hearts.**

Let your life flow through us this week so that we can give thanks in everything no matter what happens.

Grant that our lives might be one loud "Thank you, Lord" for all you have done for us. **Amen.**

Closing Slide 19 and 20 Image: To God be the Glory