



Reflections by the Lake
Devotions for an Unordinary Time

June 1, 2020
In Everything Give Thanks
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*"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus concerning you."
1 Thessalonians 5:18*

In everything—give thanks.

What a statement—what a heavy statement. I receive these emails which are supposed to provide enlightening statements and motivational sayings, and I will be honest, usually I do not pay them too much mind. However, when I received the latest one and read the verse, it irritated me. I mean seriously, in *everything*—everything going on personally and worldwide—give thanks?!

What on earth is there to give thanks about during life's storms, loss of life, a pandemic? How does one give thanks in all of life's ups and downs and do so with grace and tact?

But if you stop and look at each word: It is not *for* everything we give thanks, but *in* everything we give thanks. It takes one small word to change a statement's meaning and one's perspective, leading us to look at a situation with an alternative view which leads us to see God's faithfulness.

We may not understand His plan as it is happening, but in every storm we can find grace and thankfulness.

It is known that both my parents have passed after battles with cancer. When I was 19 my father was diagnosed, and just 18 months later, he passed. I did not know how to find thankfulness in God's plan at that time, and I certainly did not do it with grace or tact. I was so angry, hurting and in disbelief that this could happen to such a good man—to an otherwise healthy man. How could it happen to my dad? I could not see past those emotions to see all I had to be thankful for—the old videos from Christmases past, the soccer videos where you can hear my dad yelling and cheering, watching football with him, all the birthday cards he wrote, visiting each weekend during college,

playing corn hole in the yard while he was still in his pajamas because he was not comfortable in any other clothes, and picking out a graduation ring from Appalachian State University, to name a few. I did not realize during the hardship all memories I was making, and that God was also preparing me for another huge storm in the coming years.

Not long after dad passed, my mom was diagnosed. Her battle would be longer, filled with more ups and downs. Though when my mom told us she was sick or the tumors had grown, I remember us all saying, “Well, we've been through this before; we can do this.” In those moments, I realized God's plan and our ability to approach and handle the situation with grace and thoughtfulness. While previously I was clouded by emotion and unable to give thanks, now I had knowledge, maturity and growth on my side, which helped me see and skew perspectives to focus on what “good” was happening. I had learned to celebrate the small victories, to cherish the time, take photos, and have family dinners for no reason. I am grateful for the countless Hallmark movies my mom and I watched together and that sometimes we had to rewind them because she kept falling asleep and missing the ending; I am grateful for taking that one last vacation she wanted to take, and that on a whim we decided to get family portraits done. I am grateful for family dinners, eating dessert before dinner, or just eating dessert for dinner. I am grateful for the conversations we had as a family and for those my mom and I just had mother to daughter. I am grateful for the tears we shared and the grieving we did together.

I am grateful for the time I had with my parents and grateful I have pictures and memories to look back on. Through those years God taught me everything I needed to know for a solid foundation in order to be successful in thanksgiving, while maintaining grace, and to lead me to His faithfulness once more.

When hearing this statement, “in everything give thanks,” no matter the situation—illness, loss of life, a pandemic—whether you can see the purpose of the event or not, God has His plan. We give thanks to Him for continuing to watch over us, teaching us to alter our perspectives, and letting us know we have His grace and faithfulness. What are you giving thanksgiving for?