

God Wants You to Give Thanks, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:18

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Well, Thanksgiving came and went. Did your gratitude last beyond your afternoon nap? For many, that's the extent of their thanksgiving—a one-time, get-it-out-of-the-way holiday that reminds them to reflect on how blessed they are. Too often and too quickly, people resort back to being ingrates. But God wills us to be thankful *all* the time, in *all* things. That's the point of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 where Paul says, "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." So if you're saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering, you have one thing left to do in order to follow God's will—be saying thanks.

Paul's simple, direct command—in everything give thanks—allows believers no excuse for harboring ingratitude. *In everything* carries an unlimited requirement. It refers to everything that occurs in life. With the obvious exception of personal sin, we are to express thanks for *everything*. No matter what struggles or trials, God commands us to find reasons for thanking Him *always* (Acts 5:41; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-9). That's His will.

If you're not obeying *that* command, you're not following God's will. Think of it like this: If gratitude doesn't come easy for you, neither will finding God's will. Or to put it another way, if you struggle with being thankful, you'll struggle with following God's will. Need some motivation? Here are some reasons God wills you to be thankful:

1. God commands it:

Gratitude should come naturally to believers in response to all God has done on their behalf, but because of our hardness of heart, God enjoins us to thanksgiving with *commands* (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Therefore, all forms of ingratitude are *sinful*. Paul commanded the Colossians, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

When Paul describes the believer's Spirit-filled life, he writes, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Ephesians 5:20). God doesn't merely command those expressions of gratitude and leave believers helpless to comply. He enables us to articulate them (Philippians 2:13), and is pleased when we do.

Joni Eareckson Tada, who was involved in an accident that left her paralyzed from the neck down, writes, "Giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful, it's a matter of obedience."

2. Thankfulness acknowledges God's sovereignty:

The single, greatest act of worship you can render to God is to thank Him. It's the epitome of worship because through gratitude, we affirm God as the ultimate source of both trial and blessing—and acknowledge our humble acceptance of *both*.

With a thankful heart, you can say in the midst of anything, “God be praised.” That kind of attitude looks beyond the circumstance to the plan of God. It sees beyond the pain to the sovereignty of God. It remembers, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). An attitude of thankfulness enables us to deal with those who wrong us, saying with Joseph, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Those who are thankful see the providential hand of God everywhere and say, “God, I thank You for the peaceful times as well as the hard times—a difficult marriage, a challenging job, a severe illness—because I *know* You will use those things for my good and Your glory.”

The grateful Christian remembers that suffering perfects, confirms, strengthens, and establishes him (1 Peter 5:10). God wills that kind of thankfulness.

3. God judges ingratitude:

William Shakespeare wrote, “How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. Ingratitude thou marble hearted fiend.” If Shakespeare understood the hostile attitude behind thanklessness, imagine what *God* must think about it.

Ingratitude is the very *essence* of an unregenerate heart, ranking among the most intolerable sins in Scripture. The apostle Paul identified unbelievers as *ungrateful*: “For even though they knew God [through conscience and general revelation], they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). Because man in his pride fails to honor and glorify God as Creator, he also refuses to thank Him for His gracious provision. Ingratitude betrays unbelief, and *both* sins bring about God's judgment.

Although God is the source of every good thing that men possess—giving life, breath, rain, sunshine, and other natural blessings to the just and unjust alike (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:15–17)—the natural man *refuses* to thank Him. In his fallen mind, to thank God is to acknowledge his own obligation to worship Him.

In the next post, we'll look at a few more reasons. In summary, God wills our being thankful in all things because gratitude is the ultimate expression of a transformed heart. But thanklessness can infest and destroy a church, marriage, family and home. So cultivate a heart of gratitude. Be thankful for all things and in all circumstances. That's God's will. Are you following it?

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