



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V25 N19 May 7, 2023

NOT HOME YET "Don't Worry Be Happy" 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Prayer

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

"Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me. I cried out to Him with my mouth; His praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me!"

Psalms 66:16-20



Why is prayer so hard for so many?

Prayer is hard. We often feel as though we do not pray enough to God. Often our minds wander during prayer or we may easily fall asleep while talking to God. We may feel unworthy to approach God because of our frequent vices. Often we pray and see no results for our efforts. We all know we need to spend more time in prayer. Sometimes these negative feelings can discourage us from praying at all.

Martin Luther, famous 16th century reformer, wrote a letter to his barber named Peter Beskendorf, about prayer. Luther called this tract "A Simple Way to Pray." Luther used the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed as patterns for his own prayer. He would take a phrase from the Lord's Prayer and pray that for himself, for others and for whatever the Holy Spirit would bring to mind. For, "Lead us not into temptation," Luther prayed, "O dear Lord, Father and God, keep us fit and alert, eager and diligent in thy word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy, and slothful as though we had already achieved everything. ... Rather grant us wisdom and strength through thy spirit that we may valiantly resist him and gain the victory."

Luther discouraged simply repeating Scripture or praying "rote" prayers. "You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle, read word for word out of a book as were the rosaries by the laity and the prayers of the priests and monks. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer. I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. ... If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other

petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers."

Luther recommended short prayers. "Take care, however, not to undertake all of this or so much that one becomes weary in spirit. Likewise, a good prayer should not be lengthy or drawn out, but frequent and ardent."

Luther also encouraged giving prayer priority. "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, 'Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.' Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs."

When praying through the Ten Commandments, Luther recommended what he called a "garland of four strands." Luther would pray four different prayers for each commandment. These four "strands" were 1) an instruction, 2) a thanksgiving, 3) a confession, and 4) a request. The First Commandment states "You shall have no other gods before me." Luther prayed that his mind would make God supreme and that his heart would not trust in any other god. Second he would express thanks to God for his infinite compassion and that he was able to know this God. Third, Luther confessed the idols that he had placed in front of God, and fourth, he prayed that God would rule in his heart.

Luther encouraged his barber that prayer through Scripture could keep his heart warm toward God. "With practice one can take the Ten Commandments on one day, a psalm or chapter of Holy Scripture the next day, and use them as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart." The simple patterns of prayer offered by Luther can encourage us even today.

Praying God's Word like Luther for yourself and for others can get us through the difficulty of prayer and be an effective way to rejoice, pray and give thanks as Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

1

EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

16 Rejoice always,

17 pray continually,

18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle each command in this passage.
- Underline the modifying words for each command in this passage.
- Place a box around the words "for this" in v. 18 that indicate purpose.
- Double underline the words that speak to each individual in v. 18.
- Place brackets around the phrase in v. 18 that shows where God's will is found.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. What does “rejoicing” include?
2. How is “rejoicing” different from “giving thanks”?
3. How can a person practically “pray continually”?
4. How is it possible to “give thanks in all circumstances”?
5. How do the commands of verses 16-18 work together?
6. Why do you think Paul’s commands in verses 16-18 are modified with words that suggest continual and non-ceasing action?
7. What does God’s will have to do with our prayer life?
8. What is the connection between God’s will and the person of Jesus?
9. What connections do you see in the commands found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and the rest of the book of 1 Thessalonians?
10. Which of these three commands do you most need to obey immediately? How would you practically do so?

Commentary On The Text

As Paul ended his letter to the Thessalonians, he issued a number of short, “pithy” commands that would be memorable as well as significant. These rapid-fire phrases used in concluding remarks could have been a form of rhetoric used for dramatic effect, both for content of the letter and its public reading. What we have in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28 is “a compact group of final exhortations that builds on the exhortations that have come before, which is precisely what we find here. It is also the function of the peroration [concluding section of an oration] to appeal to the gut, to appeal to the deeper emotions that stir the audience” (Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 164).

Although we often apply these final instructions personally, these imperatives appear to be instructing believers on what they should be doing as they gather together for worship. “When the passage is set down in lines, it reads as though it contained the ‘headings’ of a Church service. The note of glad adoration is struck at the opening: ‘Rejoice always’ (verse 16). Prayer and thanksgiving are coupled – a trait which comes into the Church from the synagogue assembly. Christians are counseled to give the Spirit full rein, especially as He opens the mouths of the prophets (verses 19, 20); but cautioned (verse 21) that they must test the spirits (cf. 1 John 4:1). Above all, nothing unseemly must enter the assembly (verse 22), but all should be done ‘decently and in order’ (1 Corinthians 14:40). And the closing part of this ‘Church order’ – if this description is correct – contains a comprehensive prayer for the entire fellowship (verse 23)” (Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 135). 1 Thessalonians 5:27 is a command to read the letter in the gathered assembly with a call for corporate prayer (1 Thes. 5:25) and greetings (1 Thes. 5:26).

The commands found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 share what seem to be an impossible challenge to “continually” perform expressions of joy, prayer and gratitude. The fulfillment of these extreme challenges can become more achievable if they are seen as expressions of shared activity. We can rejoice, pray and give thanks “continually” in worship, prayer and teaching gatherings of believers. Paul’s hyperbolic triad is more than just a challenge to attend church. Paul encouraged believers to be frequent participants in specific forms of worship as they gathered. A corporate expression of “rejoice, pray and give thanks continually” can make the medicine of these challenges go down more easily than by self-effort. The discipline of private devotions can be bolstered by frequent participation in public worship.

Rejoicing is a frequent practice and appeal shared by Paul. “The words ‘rejoice’ and ‘joy’ are prominent in Paul’s writings. In fact, joy’ is sometimes virtually used as a definition of the Christian life (e.g., Rom. 14:17; 2 Cor. 1:24; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 3:1). Joy is part of the subjective and emotional side of being a Christian. All Christians have it in some measure, but they are also encouraged to gain more of it. Our joy is possible because we are ‘in

the Lord’ (Phil. 4:4). Our connection to Christ, and to the past, present and future benefits he bestows, fuels our joy. This joy does not necessarily lead to an outwardly happy, effervescent personality. The Bible acknowledges an aspect of joy that is present even in sorrowful situations – ‘sorrowful yet always rejoicing’ (2 Cor. 6:10; Rom. 12:15). Even in sorrow, we are connected to Christ and know that this sorrow is only temporary. Paul tells us, ‘Always rejoice.’ In the context of 1 Thessalonians, he indicates that joy may be related to affliction (1:6), describes his joy and happiness at receiving Timothy’s good report about the Thessalonians (3:9) and anticipates the joy that they will be to him at the Second Coming (2:19–20)” (Robert J. Cara, *A Study Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, EP Study Commentary, 156).

“Pray continually” does not mean we are to be on our knees at all times. “‘Without ceasing’ does not mean 60-minutes-an-hour-24 hours-a-day praying, but praying that is a consistent and regular habit. The word literally means without lapses” (Robert E. Picirilli, *Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The Randall House Bible Commentary, 90). Paul would not have had time to work or proclaim (1 Thes. 2:9-12) if his continual thanksgiving (1 Thes. 2:13) had been all consuming.

“Giving thanks” is an expression of gratitude for all that God has done for us. The phrase “in all circumstances” modifies this gratitude and speaks of the hope that God brings even in difficult times. “Offering thanksgiving to the gods was frequent and regular in ancient religions, in Judaism as in paganism. Many texts and inscriptions preserve the thanks offered to the gods for favors received. The deities were considered to be the supreme benefactors of humanity, and the obligation of the one who received their bounty was to return thanks, always with the hope of receiving further benefits in the future. The law of reciprocity dominated the exchange of gift and thanks. But the apostle exhorts the believers to offer thanks to God in all circumstances and not simply when they become recipients of some boon or good from God. This exhortation, however, is not the same as calling the church to give thanks for everything that comes their way, as if they were Stoics who believed that fate brought them what was destined to be their lot. ... The Stoic response was resignation to every situation that came their way. But the Christian approach is decidedly different since the believer trusts in a sovereign God who can turn any situation to their good (Rom. 8:28) and who can make someone more than triumphant in any adversity (Rom. 8:31–39)” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 260).

Rejoice, Pray, Gratitude (RPG) – constantly when I am with other believers and when I am alone in my sorrows. This is the positive expression, standing in contrast to the negative injunction, of God’s will (1 Thes. 4:3). **RPG** is a memorable acronym for daily encouragement for myself and others.

Word Studies/Notes

v.16 **Rejoice** “The Pauline letters frequently refer to joy (Be joyful): 1:6; 2:19; 3:9; Phil. 3:1; 4:4; etc. There is a natural and normal happiness which appears when things go well, but the joy of which Paul writes is present also when everything goes wrong (e.g. in times of persecution, vv. 15f, or sorrow, 2 Cor. 6:10, which the Thessalonians have known also, 4:13). This joy in adversity is a common theme in the N.T. and may go back to words of Jesus (Mt. 5:10–12; Lk. 6:22; 1 Pet. 5:13; Acts 16:25; Jn. 16:2–22). Paul knew this joy himself (2 Cor. 6:10; 7:4; Phil. 2:17). ‘Joy’ and ‘grace’ come from the same Greek stem and though Paul may not consciously intend to play on this (yet compare his change of ‘greetings’ to ‘grace’ in the address of his letters) it is only out of the experience of the grace of God that true joy flows, and joy is related to and founded on the great acts of God (Lk. 2:10; 24:52; Jn. 14:28)” (Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, 235).

v. 16 **always** “Paul attaches *always, continually* and *in all circumstances* to the three precepts in 5:16–18 in order to highlight that his readers are not only to rejoice, pray and give thanks for the ‘good things’ but also for the ‘bad things’ that confront this church. Thus the circumstances of the readers’ ordeals help explain how anyone can possibly be *joyful always* and *pray continually*. No one can literally rejoice and pray every second of their conscious existence, since this would prevent doing anything else. The answer comes from considering the following phrase: *give thanks in all circumstances* (or ‘give thanks in everything’), both good and bad. Similarly, the NIV’s *pray continually* expresses that these activities are frequent, not literally every second. The parallelism of these three activities all being continual suggests that the phrase *this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus* is the ground not merely for thanksgiving but also for rejoicing and praying. During our daily activities, we must focus on the task at hand, but we should never lose sight of God in our spiritual peripheral vision” (G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 170).

v. 17 **pray** “For the injunction to pray continually, compare Jesus’ intention in telling the parable of the Persistent Widow: ‘that they (the disciples) should always pray and not give up’ (Lk. 18:1). See also Romans 12:12, where the thought is again of persistence in prayer. Paul’s own letters are a case in point. They are full of prayers for his readers, and their picture of Paul as a man of prayer is corroborated by Luke’s account of him in Acts (cf. Acts 9:11; 13:2f.; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17–21; 27:35; 28:8)” (David J. Williams, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, 99).

v. 18 **circumstances** “Christians are not to give thanks ‘for everything’ but ‘in everything.’ Believers are never thankful for the specific trials and tribulations that they must endure either from living in a fallen, sinful world (general suffering endured by all people, Christian and non-Christian alike) or from their faith in Jesus Christ (specifically suffering as a Christian). Nevertheless, even in these situations they are still able to express gratitude to God for a variety of spiritual truths, such as thanking God that they do not face these hardships alone but with the empowering and comforting presence of God’s Spirit; that these burdens, no matter how great and painful, will not ‘be able to separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:38–39)” (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, 401).

v. 18 **give thanks** “When a person prays without giving thanks, he has clipped the wings of prayer, so that it cannot rise. Hence, the trio of admonitions concludes with, ‘In all circumstances give thanks.’ This phrase in everything includes affliction, for even in the midst of all these things (‘tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword’) believers are not merely conquerors but ‘more than conquerors’, inasmuch as all these things actually help them to reach their predestined goal (Rom. 8:35–37)” (William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, Vol. 3, New Testament Commentary, 138).

v. 18 **God’s will** “This is the second time that Paul has appealed to God’s will in this letter. The first was in 4:3, where he exhorts them to be sanctified and to avoid sexual immorality. It’s easy for us to see how sanctification and the avoidance of particular activities is what God wills for us. But Paul makes it clear here that God’s will is not summarized only by what believers should not do. His will is also for the redeemed to pray and give thanks to God with an assurance that God is at work on their behalf” (John Byron, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, 191).

v. 18 **in Christ** “Frequently Paul speaks about the sphere in which the benefits of God are given to humanity as in Christ Jesus, such as his redemption (Rom. 3:24), eternal life (Rom. 6:23), the grace of God (1 Cor. 1:4), or inclusion in the people of God (Eph. 3:6). ... In Christ Jesus would not be God’s will as demonstrated in Jesus’ life or made known by Jesus. Rather, it is his gracious gift, the blessing of his will, which was given to the Thessalonians to follow. Understood in this way, God’s call, expressed in his will, is part of his gift. They are blessed by being drawn into the sphere of doing his will in Christ Jesus. The reason the apostle gives for this call to joy, prayer, and thanksgiving is the strongest and highest imaginable for the Christian. These are not optional, secondary characteristics of the Christian’s existence but stand at the center of God’s plan for his people in Christ Jesus” (Green, 260).

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Do God's will by persistently worshiping him corporately and privately with expressions of exuberance, petition and gratitude in all situations.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I have a shirt that says, “Most Okayest Mom” and I stand by that. My youngest son’s mom group knows that I’m solidly the worst fifth-child parent on the planet and without their help I’d never survive. I’d say my overall rating is “better than meh” but I’ve got a lot of opportunity for improvement. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being amazing and 1 being not even close), where would you rate your parenting? Where would you rate your overall household vibe? If you find yourself, and consequently your family, stuck in a pattern of survival and chaos, a rhythm of just getting through the day, it’s time to alter course. I could give you a list of 100 things to do but instead I can think of three things to be that might make a difference in your home: joyful, thankful, prayerful. These characteristics should be obvious in the people of God, and in church on Sunday morning they’re pretty easy to pick up. But what about when we drive away? What about when the dishwasher breaks or things don’t go the way you expected? What about when your child makes a colossal mistake? Joyful, thankful, prayerful. The beauty of this combination is they are cyclical. Joy breeds thankfulness which is expressed in prayer. Prayer brings us to a place of joy overflowing with thankfulness, and so on. These attributes can create an attitude of worship in your home. Need to change your family rhythm? Start tomorrow morning with a prayer expressing gratitude and asking for joy. I can’t wait to hear how God works in your family!

What Does The Bible Say?	What Do You Think?	What Do You Do?
<p>Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What should we always do? 2. What should we continually do? 3. What should we do in all circumstances? 	<p>How do these instructions to rejoice, pray, and give thanks all work together?</p>	<p>Create a family prayer box. Find a small box and write different things or people you can pray for on each side. Flip the box and pray about what it lands on as a family.</p>

CORE COMPETENCY: Prayer

I talk to God so I can know Him, ask Him for things and find out what He wants me to do.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.


Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

_____ I completed my Bible Study

_____ I memorized this week’s verse

_____ I brought my Bible to church

_____ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME _____
GRADE _____
PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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