

**While I'm Waiting
(Week 11)
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
"The To-Do List... Part Two"**

Introduction

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. **1 Peter 2:9**

As we have previously discussed, when Paul closes out his letter to the Thessalonians, he gives them an extensive "to-do list". The first section of the list tells us how we are to love and be patient with one another. The child of God, who has been filled with The Spirit of God, will naturally love. In fact, when we read the lists of The Spirit's "fruit" that will be manifested in every believer, love tops the list.

But the fruit of The Spirit is LOVE, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... **Galatians 5:22-23a**

A careful reading of the last chapter of **1 Thessalonians** will reveal that Paul mentions many of these attributes by name: *Love and Peace (vs. 13)*, *Self-control (vs. 8)*, *Patience (vs. 14)*, and *Joy (vs. 16)*. The ones that he does not mention specifically by name are all very much implied in the text.

The second section of Paul's to-do list has to do with being joyful in The LORD. You see, our Heavenly Father expects His children to act a certain way as they go about their lives in this fallen world. We all know that we have been called to holiness as we await The LORD'S return (**1 Thessalonians 4:4-8**). But the question remains, what is the required attitude that we are commanded to have to go along with our holiness? Have you ever known someone who truly believed that they were living a sanctified life, but if you were completely honest about it, you couldn't stand to be around them? Allow me to answer for you. If you have been in church any length of time, the answer is as resounding... YES! So, just what is it about these people, that seem to be good at abstaining from the sins of the flesh, that causes no one to want to be near them? Answer: Those who are legalistic about being obedient to The LORD'S commands, rather than, being obedient because of a love for Christ are often quite miserable. In short, they have no JOY. And trust me when I say this, that kind of faith will never be attractive to a lost person. Legalism leads only to misery, but loving Christ with all our being, leads not only to the right kind of heart obedience, but it also brings great joy to the believer.

In fact, God requires us to be joyful. It is what He expects of us in this life. I once heard a preacher say as he looked out upon a crowd of church members, who all appeared to be miserable, "If you truly have the joy of The LORD this morning, please tell your face!" The born-again child of God has every reason to live a joyous and victorious life. There really should not be complaining miserable people in The Church. God is not pleased with the complaints of those whom He has rescued. If you do not believe me, just ask the children of Israel who died in the wilderness after God had rescued them from the bondage of Egypt. They complained all the way through the wilderness, and God allowed them to die there in their misery! Far be it from one who has been rescued to be unsatisfied with their rescuer! God expects us to be joyful, prayerful, and grateful.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand fully, that in order for God to be pleased with them, they must exhibit the Joy of The LORD consistently in spite of even severe persecution. It was not easy for them living in their own personal "wilderness" experience in that pagan city. But God often allows us to be tested in the wilderness to prove that our faith is genuine. In short, when you get squeezed, whatever is inside you will come out! As the Thessalonian church was being put under tremendous pressure for their faith, Paul made it very clear to them that God expected Joy, Prayer, and Thanksgiving to pour out of them as a result. He expects this very same thing from all of us today. The child of God is expected to be *Ever Joyful, Ever Prayerful, and Ever Thankful*. Please allow me to explain.

Ever Joyful**Rejoice always....****1 Thessalonians 5:16**

The second “fruit” of The Spirit as listed in **Galatians 5** is Joy. I believe the order is extremely important in this list, for apart from love, there can be little joy in one’s Christian experience. The legalist believes that they are good at obeying the “rules”, as it were, but they come up short in being joyful. Why? Because, although they may fear God, they struggle when it comes to loving Him. Much like the eldest sibling in the parable of The Prodigal Son, they view their service to God as a laborious chore, rather than an act of love.

Paul commands the church at Thessalonica **“Rejoice always” (vs. 16)**. Make no mistake. The language that he uses is meant to describe a perpetual state of “joyousness”. And it begins with loving God. Do this, and joy will come naturally as a result. Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter.

You are being guarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith — more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire — may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you LOVE Him; though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him, and you REJOICE with inexpressible and glorious JOY, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. **1 Peter 1:5-9** (emphasis added)

You see, the child of God is to be continuously rejoicing, because, no matter what, we have been saved (delivered from God’s wrath), and we love Him for it! We are not, as Paul would say, **“like those who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13)**. And as result of our love and hope in Christ, we rejoice! No matter what happens to us, or around us, we are to live in a perpetual state of rejoicing, because we are confident that God will keep every promise that He has made. We won’t abandon our faith during trying times, because we have been given the faith that overcomes all adversity.

So, ask yourself this question, “Do I live in a perpetual state of joy?” If the answer is no, then you have some work to do. Remember that joy and happiness are not the same things. We can have joy even in extreme sorrow. I have watched as many of my brothers and sisters in Christ have lost loved ones over this past year. Sandi and myself have lost a few dear friends as well. We grieve for the loss, but not as those who have no hope. We know that in Christ, even death has been defeated. For us *to live is Christ and to die is gain*. We can rejoice, come what may, for our security is as sure as Christ Himself. For:

Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: Because of You we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in ALL these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor ANY OTHER CREATED THING will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD. **Romans 8:35-39**

Wow! I think that if **1 Corinthians 13** is called “The Love Chapter”, then **Romans 8** ought to be called “The Hope and Joy Chapter”! Why can we rejoice in all things? Because NOTHING can separate us from the love that we have in Christ Jesus. Don’t be a gloomy legalist. Be a joyful believer, who has placed their every confidence in Christ. Nobody wants what the legalists have to offer, but do-we-ever live in a time and place where the world could use the joy of The Spirit! I love the story of the four friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus in **Matthew Chapter 9**. Before Jesus ever healed him of his physical impairment, He looked at him and said, **“Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.”** The word that He uses there for “have courage” (*tharseo* in the Greek) means to be of good cheer. You see, when

your sins are forgiven, you really should be pretty happy about it! Wouldn't you agree? God does. In fact, He expects us to go about our daily lives in a perpetual state of rejoicing! So how are you doing with that? If you have the joy of Christ this morning, then don't forget to tell your face!

Ever Prayerful

Pray Constantly....

1 Thessalonians 5:17

The KJV renders this verse, ***“Pray without ceasing”***. So, is Paul telling the Thessalonians to quit their jobs and remain on their knees at the church in a perpetual state of prayer? Hardly. In fact, he told them earlier that they must work to earn their own living and not to become a burden on others. So how is a Christian supposed to remain in a constant state of prayer and all the while going about their daily business? The answer is simple. We are to go about our lives in a continuous state of communication with God. We pray our way through every situation.

You see, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, the part of ourselves that connected us to The Spirit of God died. We were cut off, as it were, from communion with God. Jesus died on the cross to restore that connection. Simply put, Jesus died, so that we can pray without ceasing. He re-established the connection between us and God. Therefore, thanks to Christ, our Intercessor, we can be standing before the throne of God at a moments notice. As the old hymn so eloquently says, “What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer”. To pray without ceasing is to do just that. Remain in an attitude of constant prayer, seeking God's will in all things. Before every decision, pray for His guidance; include Him in every discussion.

Being in a continuous attitude of prayer doesn't require formal scripted prayers. It is actually quite the contrary. It means “praying of the fly”, as it were. Remember the story of Nehemiah, when he went before the King of Persia? He had been burdened to pray for the people's return to Jerusalem after their seventy years of captivity had expired. When he came into the King's presence, the monarch noticed that he was saddened and asked him what he needed. Nehemiah then said, “So I prayed to the God of Heaven for an answer”. Now, do you think for a moment that he had time to go off and get all “formal” with God in some prepared statement of prayer? Of course not. He prayed in an instant and received an answer. Why? Because he had already established a connection with God on the subject.

As a pastor, I am often asked for Godly advice. When someone asks me a question regarding spiritual guidance, I try and ALWAYS quickly ask God for the proper response. The person that I am answering often has no earthly idea that I prayed before I spoke. It is a quick and informal request for guidance. I can do this, because Christ has already established my connection with the throne of God. I can go to Him, without notice, in an instant, and expect an answer. When I do this, God never fails to bring to my mind just the right scripture for my response. Can you see what I am talking about here?

Jesus commands us to ***“abide in Him”***, and we will bear fruit (***John 15***). This means that we are to remain in a perpetual state of prayer with Him, so that we can always respond to every circumstance properly. Having trouble deciding what to do this morning? Wonder whether or not you should take that job offer, buy that house, walk away from that relationship that constantly drags you into sin? Then pray. Pray your way through every decision in life. Pray without ceasing.

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God — Who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly — and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

James 1:5-6

And by the way, if you want to have joy in your walk with God. Continual prayer is the key. The more that we pray, the more that we are reminded of God's sovereignty. The more that we remember that He is in control of all things, the more joyous we will be. Abide in Christ and the fruit of The Spirit will be manifested in your every day life. And the fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace... So pray continuously.

Ever Thankful

Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

This particular command is closely tied to the one before it. To pray continually is to be reminded of how much we are to be thankful. Let's face it, in our own era, this past year in particular has been really difficult. Between a world pandemic and so much political unrest and division, it's pretty easy to lose focus on all that we have been given. In short, we get so wrapped up in identifying our worries and distractions that we forget to count our blessings as it were. We must never forget that in Christ we have been given everything that we need. And as such we are commanded repeatedly in the Scriptures to be ever thankful.

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable — if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy — dwell on these things.

Philippians 4:6-8

In short, what these verses tell us is to remember all the good things that we have in Christ and do not allow our minds to dwell on the shortcomings of this world. If we remember to be thankful and to give our worries to God, He will exchange them for peace. This peace is beyond all comprehension, and it will guard our hearts like a sentry, protecting us from the anxiety that is so prevalent in this world. In the end, it really comes down to a question of faith. Do we really believe God's Word when it promises:

We know that ALL things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

So be ever thankful, child of God, for He will see to it that all things work out for our benefit.

Notice that Paul does not say "be thankful for all things". There are many things in life that cause us great pain. He is not saying that we should be thankful for them. He IS however saying that we must be thankful IN all things. I'm sure the church at Thessalonica wasn't exactly thrilled about the persecutions that they were forced to endure, but in the midst of this persecution, Paul was reminding them that they had much to be thankful for. It really comes down to what we choose as the focus of our hearts. Do we wallow in self pity over the things that cause us pain, or do we focus on all that God has done for us? Jesus tells us:

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.

John 16:33

I am ever thankful that my hope is not in my government, my bank account, or my own personal achievements, but rather, as the great hymn-writer has said, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus Name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand." It is because of this eternal truth, that we can live in a perpetual state of thanksgiving! Can I get a witness?

And let all of God's ever joyful, ever prayerful, and ever thankful saints declare... TRUTH!!!