

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances.”

Martin Luther once wrote, “Gratitude is the basic Christian attitude.” People of faith who have been set free from the power of sin, death, and hopelessness are often inclined toward a posture of gratitude and thanksgiving.

However, this “basic Christian attitude” also has to be practiced with intentionality. Like glasses we put on each day, gratitude sharpens our focus on the blessings in our lives as well as on the One from whom all blessings flow. In the words of Christian author Max Lucado, “The grateful heart is like a magnet sweeping over the day, collecting reasons for gratitude...”

Giving thanks and expressing gratitude is truly a spiritual practice that strengthens our relationship with Jesus and with one another. But in my own life, I find it more difficult to practice this “basic Christian attitude” during times of high stress, pain, uncertainty, and grief...something many of us are experiencing so many months into this pandemic.

So how do we follow the invitation from Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians to give thanks in all circumstances?

One way is to attend to the small things in life that bring us joy right now —nothing is too small to mentally note as a blessing and gift from God.

I particularly like the way ELCA pastor Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber does this in one of her recent blog posts.

She writes:

Give Us This Day Our Daily Gratitude

...Exercise and gratitude are like, God’s own anti-depressants. In this time of loss and suffering and turmoil, when not one of us is spared of sorrow, this morning I made myself list some things I am genuinely grateful for right now, today, in this very moment. And it made me feel better. Feel free to add your own. Also, this is obviously not a comprehensive list of that which is worthy to be grateful for, but simply what came to mind in the moment:

+ That I have been given one more day, I give thanks.

- + That the birds still sing each morning, impossibly early outside my window, I give thanks.
- + For the sun rising once again in the East, I give thanks.
- + That for this day I have bread, I give thanks.
- + For drinkable water, for breathable air, and Dairy Queen dipped cones I give thanks.
- + For one more day of mobility I give thanks.
- + For novelists who create worlds and characters and stories for our minds and not for our TVs, I give thanks.
- + For the puppy I got at the beginning of quarantine who is currently destroying my life, I give thanks.
- + For cell phone reception, and I-guess-its-better-than-nothing ZOOM calls and reliable internet service, I give thanks.
- + That I am loved, I give thanks.
- + That I am forgiven, I give thanks.
- + That I am alive, I give thanks.
- + That you, O God are known by many names, I give thanks.
- + That you, O God are present when I feel only your absence, I give thanks.
- + That you are God and I am not, I give the most thanks. Forgive me when I forget that one.
- + And for every other gift I am too self-obsessed to see, but that totally comes from you. thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Amen.

How might you practice gratitude in an intentional way today? What things would appear on your list if you wrote one right now, in this very moment?

Let us pray,

God you are the giver of all good things. Help us attend to you and your spirit, giving thanks wherever we are, no matter the circumstances we face. Grant us courage to pray without ceasing and trust to rely on your goodness to carry us through. In Jesus' name, Amen.