

THANKFUL, IN SPITE OF. . .

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–28



**Rejoice always, pray continually,
give thanks in all circumstances.”**

You think you've got problems? Yes, you surely do; we all have our own set of problems, some worse than others. But during World War II, Corrie ten Boom faced more difficulties than I can even imagine when she was confined with her sister in Ravensbruck, one of the most notorious Nazi prison camps in Germany.

One special problem Corrie and her barracks mates faced was a terrible infestation of fleas. The fleas were thick and biting, a very real health issue. (Just think of how aggravating one flea is to your pet and multiply that by thousands.) But while most women would have whined and complained about their circumstances, Corrie thanked God for the fleas.

How could Corrie be grateful for fleas? Because of the horrendous fleas, the cruel prison guards would not enter the barracks. So Corrie and her sister were able to conduct uninterrupted Bible studies with the other women, bringing many of them to Christ. They were focused on the bigger picture—souls over fleas. They knew that God had not forgotten them—he had blessed them with fleas!

What are the fleas in your life? Unruly teenagers? Financial stresses? Pesky relationships? You name them. Whatever they are, be thankful for a God who is bigger than your difficulties, a God who sees the whole picture of your life, not just this irritating moment in time. Learn to thank God for his blessings in spite of your current problems. Be grateful that he has not forgotten you. And, yes, be thankful for your fleas, because they may well be opportunities in disguise.¹

OPEN IT

- 1. Describe a time of circumstance that resulted in great rejoicing. What caused this response? What was it like?**

¹ Mary Hollingsworth Taken from *Fulfilled* ©2014 HarperCollins Christian Publishing



EXPLORE IT

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–28

2. What is the will of God for every believer, according to verses 16–18?
3. What are we called to abstain from?
4. How much does God sanctify the believer?
5. What three commands does Paul give to the church, in verses 25–28?



GET IT

Writing over one hundred years ago, Professor James Denney of Scotland called these three commands “the standing orders of the gospel.” They are “standing orders” because they always apply to every Christian in every situation. The Greek makes this very clear because these imperatives are all in the present tense. You could translate it “continually rejoice, continually pray, and continually give thanks.”

This is a great challenge, isn't it? After all, we would have no problem if the text said,

“Rejoice sometimes.”

“Pray occasionally.”

“Give thanks when you feel like it.”

It's the modifiers that trip us up:

“Always.”

“Continually.”

“In all circumstances.”

This suggests that the real impact of the gospel will be seen when we don't feel joyful, when we don't want to pray, and when we can't think of a reason to be thankful. That's when we discover if our Christianity is the genuine article or a spiritual counterfeit. These simple commands reveal the true life-changing power of Jesus Christ. When He **enters a life, He changes it from the inside out so that we have both the power and the desire to rejoice, to pray, and give thanks even in the worst moments of life.**²

² <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/the-standing-orders-of-the-gospel/>

6. What are some things that make these commands difficult to follow?
7. What does it mean to be joyful "always," pray "continually," and give thanks "in all circumstances"? How does being a recipient of the gospel make this lifestyle easier to live out?
8. How does this type of lifestyle promote evangelism when it is lived out in front of unbelievers?
9. Paul's final instructions were shared in the context of a local church setting. How can these truths be lived out in the church? How does a church evaluate whether these are evident in the church?

*Do you know what it means to **quench the Holy Spirit**? What do you do when you quench your thirst? You drink some water and the thirst is put away. When you quench a fire, you put it out—you smother it. How do you quench the Spirit of God? You quench the Holy Spirit by not doing something He tells you to do. When you walk in the Spirit and are filled with the Spirit, you don't want to quench Him. When He tells you to do something, you do it.³*

10. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 and then 20–22. Verse 19 acts as a hinge to the two doors of the passage before and after it. Why is the Spirit's power so important to the tasks that are listed before and after it?
11. What command do you struggle with the most? How can the empowering of the Spirit enable victory instead of defeat?

Ray Stedman has an excellent summary writing that Paul's **command** says in essence...

***Do not ignore the Scripture's wisdom:** Do not despise prophesying. Unfortunately, because of certain cultic tendencies in our day, we think of prophesying as some special power to predict the future either for ourselves individually or for the world at large. But prophesying was not that. **Dr. F. F. Bruce**, who is one of the great expositors of our day, says prophesying is. . .*

³ Jeremiah, D. God in You: Releasing the Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Life. Multnomah Publishers

Declaring the mind of God in the power of the Spirit.

*In those early days, before the New Testament was written, this was done orally; prophets spoke the mind of the Spirit in an assembly. But since the writing of the Scriptures we have very little need for any kind of prophesying other than that based upon the Scriptures. **So prophesying really becomes what we call today expository preaching and teaching.** It is what I am doing right now. It is opening the mind of God from the Word of God. Do not despise that, says the apostle. That is the wisdom of God. That is telling you how to act, how to think and how to order your life. Do not treat it lightly. It will save you countless headaches and heartaches if you observe it.⁴*

12. In what practical ways do we “despise prophecies” today?

13. Why is the teaching ministry so important to the church? How can we prepare ourselves for the teaching of God's Word to keep us from despising it unknowingly?

14. What criteria should be used to determine whether the teaching we are sitting under is God-honoring?

Ray Stedman sums up the prayer calling on us to...

Recognize that God is able to minister to the whole man — spirit, soul and body. God can touch you in all those areas. Then you can rest on his faithfulness. He will do it! Choose to obey and He will give you power to perform; but He will not give you the power to perform until you make the choice to obey!

And always remember the end: it is until the coming of our Lord Jesus. All through this letter this has been the great hope set before us. Jesus is coming again. God's kingdom will come on earth. There is only a limited time of testing to go through now. It cannot go on forever. One lifetime is very short. I often think of the motto that used to be prominent in many homes,

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

I would like to change one word in that: "Only what's done by Christ will last." That is where the apostle leaves us, with the hope of the coming of our Lord, and the resources God has provided, so that we may live in a new and different way in the midst of this modern age.⁵

15. When have you found God faithful in keeping you from sin?

⁴ Quoted from Living Christianly by Ray Stedman found @ http://preceptaustin.org/1_thessalonians_520_commentary.htm

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16. In what way do you currently need God's faithfulness to cause you to strive towards holiness?

A Holy Kiss

Its character was completely divorced from the sensual. A pure display of the deep emotion of Christian love, this type of kiss remained a Christian custom until abuse and heathen misunderstanding caused the practice to be curtailed.⁶

17. What does Paul's command about their greeting tell us about the church?

Paul ended with another reminder that the Word of God is the important thing in the local church. The Word must govern our conduct and guide our lives. We are to read the Word personally, but we also need to hear the Word in the fellowship of the local church, for the one experience helps balance the other.⁷

18. Paul commands that they read this letter so all can be impacted by its message. Take a couple moments and discuss as a group how this letter has impacted you and your group?

⁶ Pfeiffer, C F: Wycliffe Bible Commentary. 1981. Moody or Logos

⁷ Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor or Logos