

“IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS”

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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–I–

1. **[Both Trad. & Contemp. Services:]** Read Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Pray.

2. [Story of Little Boy Giving Thanks Anyway]

A little boy was asked by his father to say a blessing at the dinner table. While the rest of the family waited, the boy slowly and carefully eyed every dish of food that had been prepared. And after the examination, he bowed his head and prayed... “Lord, I don't like the looks of it, but thanks for it anyway. Amen.”

A–Well, today's scripture from 1 Thessalonians says that we are to... [NRSV:] “*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*”
[MSG:] “*Thank God no matter what happens, [for] this is way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.*”

B–But HOW do we do that in the midst of things that we “*don't like the looks of*”?

1–E.G., When we've just lost a love one to some disease or tragedy?

2–Or when the stock market crashes and the economy falls to pieces?

3–Or when life changes around us and scares us to death?

3. Well, I believe that that's where our faith comes in to play, because giving thanks isn't a feeling or an emotion, but an act of the will... a conscious choice.

A–And faith teaches us that (like this little boy), we can *choose* to BE thankful, even when we don't “*like the looks of things*” – i.e., even when we don't *feel* thankful. ¹

B–So, using the acronym T-H-A-N-K-S, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, let me suggest just a few things for which faith can teach us to thank God, even in the midst of difficulty and hardship.

–II–

4. First of all, I believe the **T** can stand for something that we probably don't give thanks for very often: **TRIALS and TROUBLES**.

A–Now, I'm not saying that we have to *like* or *want* them, and I'm not saying that God *causes* them. ²

B–But I *do* believe that the Bible teaches us that it's only through the trials and troubles of life that we can be the strong people of faith that God wants us to be.

C-[Story of Gold Refining]

A student was once doing a report on the processing of gold, and so he visited a metallurgist on a field trip, and asked how gold is refined. The metallurgist replied that first the raw ore is put into a cauldron, where it's heated up until it begins boiling, in order to boil out all the impurities. So, the student asked, "*Well, how do you know when its ready?*" To which the refiner replied, "*I know it's ready when I can stand over it and see my reflection.*"

D-Friends I wonder if, through the trials and troubles of life, God is waiting to *His* reflection in us.

E-I wonder if sometimes the only way we can grow in our faith is by experiencing trials and troubles, because it's *there* that we learn to trust God completely, and for *that* reason we can give thanks for them.

5. The **H** in the word THANKS I believe reminds us to be thankful to God for **HOME** – that is, for our family and those closest to us who care for us.

A-Home, after all, is where we are prepared and shaped for life... into the people that we are today.

B-It's be a place where faith is put into action, and where God's love is modelled.

C-But of course, "home/family" don't just refer to our earthly home or biological family, but also to our "spiritual family" and heavenly home – to our church family and Christian friends – ...

D-...Because when Christ Jesus lives in our heart, we are a member of the "family of God" – one of God' children, and for that we can give thanks.

6. I believe that the **A** can stand for **AMERICA** – it reminds us to constantly pray and give thanks to God for our Country, despite its current political and economic challenges and uncertainty.

A-You see, too often today, we spend all our time complaining about what's *wrong* with our politicians, our government, and our country in general, instead of *praying* for them and asking God to bless them and guide them in *His* will.

B-But I believe that if we people of faith can once again recapture the spirit of thanks brought over by those first pilgrims nearly 400 years ago, we'll begin to see true revival and godliness once again sweep through our land.

7. I think that the **N** in THANKS can remind us to give thanks for **NOW** – for today, for the present, for the blessings of *this* moment.

A-[Story of Clock Who Had Nervous Breakdown]

Did you hear about the clock that had a nervous breakdown? One day it began to think about how often it would have to tick during the coming year. Figuring two ticks per second, 120/minute, 7,200 each hour, 172,800/day, & 1,209,600 ticks every week, the clock realized it would tick nearly 63 million times during the next 12 months.

The more it thought about this, the more anxious it became. Finally, the clock became so distraught that it suffered a nervous collapse. Confiding in a counselor, the clock complained that it didn't have the strength to tick that often.

The counselor responded, "But how many ticks must you tick at a time?" The clock answered, "Only one." "Well, simply tick one tick at a time and don't worry about the next one. You'll get along fine, I'm sure." And that's what the clock did.

B–The scriptures tell us that “*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*” (Psalm 118:24).

1–Too often we focus our thoughts on what might happen *tomorrow* or on what *did* happen *yesterday*, and as a result, we end up taking *today's* blessings for granted.

2–Instead, we need to be sure to take time to thank God for *now* –for the blessings of the present.

8. I believe that the **K** can help us remember to give thanks for **KINDNESS** – both the kindness that we *receive* and the kindness that God wants us to *give* to others.

A–Just like our blessings, today we also tend to take kindness for granted, as well – simple word and notes and emails of thanks and appreciation to others for who they are and what they do.

B–[Story of Kind Word]

Perhaps you know about the man who'd had a rough week at work went to a local restaurant for weekend breakfast. And when the waitress asked what he'd like, he said, “*Bacon, eggs, toast, and a kind word.*”

A short while later, the waitress came back and brought the food. The man asked, “*What about the kind word?*”... to which the waitress whispered, “*Don't eat the eggs.*”

C–You see, people today need kindness *and* kind words, and as people of faith we have the spiritual and emotional resources to be able to pass it to them.

D–So let's not only *thank* God for Kindness, but let's be an *agent* of Kindness, as well.

9. Finally, I believe that for a Christian, the **S** should remind us to give thanks for the most important way we make it through hard times – the gift of our **SAVIOR**, Jesus Christ.

A–A few years back, a chorus based on today's scripture put it well:

B—*“Give thanks with a grateful heart, Give thanks to the Holy One;
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ his Son;
And now let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’ Let the poor say, ‘I am rich.’
Because of what the Son has done for us. Give thanks.”*

–III–

10. You see, the word T-H-A-N-K-S can give us some things to help us remember to be thankful in all situations and circumstances:

A—The **T** reminds us to be thankful even for **Trials/Troubles**;

B—The **H** reminds us to thank God for our **Home** and family;

C—The **A** reminds us to be thankful for our country, **America**;

D—The **N** reminds us to thank God for the blessings of **Now**;

E—The **K** is a reminder to be thankful for **Kindness**, both given and received;

F—And the **S** reminds us to constantly thank God for Jesus, our **Savior**.

11. After all, there may be a lot of things in life that we don't “like the looks of” – that on the surface don't seem to deserve our thanks.
12. But my prayer is that this Thanksgiving holiday, our faith can help us say with confidence (like the little boy), *“Lord, I may not like the looks of it, but by your grace I'll get through it, so thanks anyway!”*

ENDNOTES:

1. Not all things are “good” in and of themselves, but Romans 8:28 reminds us that through God, *“all things work together for good with those who love Him.”* In other words, it's only through our faith in God and in our trust in Jesus that we are able to *“give thanks in all circumstances”* ... even in the bad ones.
2. No. I've often heard it said that *“God often allows what He doesn't will.”*