

Leadership

6.29.2025

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

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TEXT ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

INTRODUCTION

- Imagine starting your day with *300 hungry kids*, no food, no budget, and no backup plan—except prayer. That was a Tuesday for George Müller.
- Müller was a 19th-century pastor who ran orphanages in Bristol, England. Over his lifetime, he recorded more than 50,000 specific answers to prayer—and over half of those were answered on the *same day* he prayed them. No donors, no GoFundMe, no bake sales—just faith, a prayer journal, and an absurd level of trust in God.
- One morning, a housemother told Müller, “The children are ready for school, but there’s no food.” Müller didn’t panic. He said, “Have them sit down at the tables.” And then—get this—he *thanked* God for the food they didn’t yet have. (Talk about awkward grace before a meal.)
- Moments later, a baker knocked on the door. “Couldn’t sleep last night,” he said. “Felt like you might need bread. I got up at 2am to bake this bread for you.” Then came the milkman—cart broken down, milk about to spoil. “He tells Muller, the milk will go bad before I can fix the tire. Can you use this?”
- Prayer wasn’t just *talking to God* for Müller—it was *trusting God, hearing God, walking with God*. That’s the heart of today’s message from **1 Thess 5:16-22**. We’re not just here to talk *about* prayer or the Spirit—we’re here to step into it. God still speaks. God still provides. And yes, God still answers prayer. So we’re going to take time at the end of the sermon for a few minutes of talking to and responding to God.
- If you have your 1 Thessalonians journal or you have your app open, I want you to look at these eight commands. They are all about talking to God and responding to God. This is about walking with God. They are commands, meaning these aren’t suggestions or encouragements or best practices. These are LIFE GIVING. As a son or daughter of God, you are drawn into this for your good & joy. 18b **for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**
- Paul commands these and gives them in rapid fire to emphasize something... we can find ourselves giving ourselves to other things that rob us of talking to and hearing from God!
- Paul is telling us “**a life pleasing to God is a life pleased with God.**”- our BIG IDEA. It is a life pleased with knowing and walking with God through all the ups & downs. Paul’s commands fall into 2 categories: practicing the presence of God and partnering with the Spirit of God.

1. Practice the Presence of God (vv.16-18)

- “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances”**—all revolve around the theme of *talking to God as a way of practicing His presence*. These aren’t just stand-alone spiritual tips; they’re a rhythm of relational life w/ God, grounded in deep awareness of His nearness.
- “Rejoice always”** – This is a call to continual, habitual joy in the Lord. Importantly, Christian joy is not based on ever-changing circumstances but on the unchanging character and promises of God. But what does it look like to “rejoice always” – am I supposed to sing songs to God while I’m in a team meeting at work? Well, that might work for me, but it won’t work for you. The good news is Paul’s not even talking about his circumstances. When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippian church, he was in a Roman prison and yet wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.”

- Our problem is we have bought the lie of a secular, commercialized, consumeristic society that only joyful circumstances can bring joy. There is nothing beyond what we see but the next relationship, the next achievement, the next 100 likes on a post, the next trip or whatever, will bring you joy. It is **a disoriented joy centers around created things to give us what only our Creator can.**
- Paul isn't talking about momentary rejoicing that comes and goes. The verb is Present continuous tense – meaning rejoice ALWAYS. Piper: **"If you only experience joy on your best days, you have not yet tasted the best joy"**
- ILL – There was a moment during my PhD when I could've been overwhelmed with anxiety—comprehensive exams. No study guide, just walk in, get two questions, choose one, and write for two hours. I had three of these—six hours total—and I needed a B+ on each just to move on. Years of seminars and months of study led to that morning.
- As I drove in listening to worship, the Spirit overwhelmed me—not with fear, but with joy. I remembered how far God had brought me—from a kid who flunked out of high school to this moment. As the sun rose, all I could do was praise. Not an ounce of anxiety—just gratitude and worship.
- Verse 17 says, **"Pray without ceasing."** That doesn't mean nonstop talking—it means persistent, regular, ongoing conversation with God. Because of the Holy Spirit, we can talk to God anytime—morning commute, lunch break, walking into a meeting. And it doesn't have to be long. Sometimes it's 10 seconds of surrender, a whispered "help me," or just a thank you.
- I'm working on two things in my own life right now—longer, focused times of daily prayer *and* short, spontaneous conversations with God throughout the day. Because the truth is, there's never a moment where God says, "You AGAIN??? Leave me alone." But it *does* grieve Him when I act like He's not even there—when I go hours without rejoicing in Him, seeking His guidance, or even acknowledging His presence.
- Disciplined prayer times actually help build that spontaneous prayer life. And fasting? That's the cheat code. Fasting creates a physical hunger that nags you all day—but when you're seeking God, those hunger pangs become prayer prompts. You start turning physical longing into spiritual communion.
- Of course, this kind of life doesn't happen overnight. Continuous prayer is something you *cultivate*. It's like working out. I got off rhythm the last 2 months after some travel and being sick. I finally hit a workout again—and the next day, I moved like I was 80. Just sore and tired. If I had judged the whole experience by that one day, I'd never go back to the gym.
- Prayer's the same. If it feels foreign at first, don't quit. Start small. Like Daniel—set three daily reminders to stop and pray, even for a few minutes. Do that for a month, and you'll begin to experience a new depth of intimacy and spontaneity in your walk with God.
- v.18 **give thanks in all circumstances;** the Greek literally says "in everything" give thanks – not necessarily "for everything." We aren't expected to be thankful for evil, suffering, or sin; rather, we are to remain thankful to God in the midst of every situation.
- One commentator explains, **"Giving thanks in every situation does not mean that we must be happy with every situation or resigned to accept matters without praying and working for change... But by faith we can say, 'Lord, I trust that You are good and you know what You're doing in this difficult situation'."**
- How do these commands orient us to thrive in a broken and fallen world? **Verses 16–18** call us away from two common ditches when life is hard. One ditch is **denial**—pretending everything's fine. We ignore pain, avoid hard conversations, and put on a fake "everything is awesome" smile.

The other ditch is **cynicism**—constantly complaining, ruminating on past wounds, and making our pain the main character in every room, every post, every moment.

- Paul refuses both extremes. He's writing to a church that's been through it—persecution, suffering, loss. And Paul himself? He's no stranger to hardship: shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, abandoned, burdened (2 Cor. 11). He doesn't deny pain. He acknowledges it. But he doesn't let it define him either.
- Paul's call to **rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances** is a radical re-centering. Not because life isn't hard. But because the gospel is greater.
- He's saying: your suffering is real—but it's not the most important thing about you. You are no longer defined by what's been done *to* you or even *by* you. You are defined by what Christ has done *for* you,
- Through Jesus, you've been redeemed, adopted, and set free. That means your life doesn't have to orbit around your pain anymore—it revolves around God's love, God's presence, and God's promises.
- So yes, recognize the brokenness around you. But also recognize the power of the One who overcame it. The suffering, brokenness, and pain of your past or present no longer gets to define you. Jesus does. And, he defines your future.
- Rejoicing, praying, giving thanks - **"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."** (5:18b) With the impact that living these 3 commands out could have on our lives, is it any wonder it is God's will for us?
- This way of living is completely countercultural (ancient Roman observers marveled, "see how joyful these Christians are in suffering!"). For today's believers, obeying these verses means standing out in a complaining, anxious society as people of hope, persistent in prayer and praise. This pleases God and draws others' attention to the power of Christ in us. **"a life pleasing to God is a life pleased with God."** Practice the presence of God.

2. Partner with the Spirit of God. Vv.19-22

- **¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.**
- These first two are connected and the last 3 flow out of them. **Do not quench the Spirit.**
- The context suggests that supernatural moves of the Spirit through prophecy were being looked down upon or forbidden by some in Thessalonica. Possible false prophecies had caused confusion in the church. So some had just shut it down.
- Paul says this is quenching the Spirit. Now, pause on that for a moment – quenching God's Spirit sounds like don't stop hurricanes or don't stop gravity. God is absolutely powerful and God can do whatever he desires. Yet, in this passage and in other places, it is clear that there are things God has said he absolutely will NOT do unless we partner with His Spirit to do it.
- The word **quench** is used for putting out a fire—like dousing a campfire with water. Paul's drawing on a biblical image: the Spirit as fire. The Spirit can also be **"grieved"** (Eph 4:30) or **"resisted"** (Acts 7:51) by human sin and failure to walk by faith.
- Sam Storms puts it this way: **"The Spirit comes to us as a fire, either to be fanned into full flame... or to be doused by the water of human fear, control, or flawed theology."**
- We quench the Spirit when we suppress His promptings—through doubt, disobedience, pride, or simply ignoring Him. Sometimes it's fear. Sometimes it's trying to stay in control. Sometimes it's drawing attention to ourselves instead of pointing to Jesus.
- And one of the most common ways churches quench the Spirit? **We just forget He's even there.** Paul is urging us: don't douse the fire. THIS MORNING – I am 100% convinced the Spirit is here and he is desiring to work and move in us and through us. **Question for you** – Have you

quenched the Spirit in your life? Today, will you embrace his move or pull back out of fear and quench the Spirit?

- **"Do not despise prophecies"** – "Spirit-inspired messages or utterances given for the edification of the church"

There are two types of prophecy. One is Scripture – this is divinely-inspired and infallible. That's the Bible – written for all believers. But there is also the gift of prophecy in a church that is lesser and can be fallible and is subject to evaluation.

- The Greek word for despise means to treat something as worthless or dismiss it outright. In today's terms: "Don't roll your eyes at prophetic words. Don't write off Spirit-prompted messages just because they make you uncomfortable."
 - Yes, prophecy has been misused. Yes, some have abused it or gotten weird with it. But that doesn't mean we throw the whole gift out. As [Sam Storms] puts it bluntly: **"It doesn't matter how badly people have abused this gift—it is a sin to despise prophecy."**
 - This is a command, not a suggestion. To despise prophecy is to downplay one of the Spirit's key ways of speaking to and building up the church. And when we do that, we risk quenching the very Spirit we claim to welcome.
 - So the invitation isn't to be reckless—it's to be receptive. Not to believe everything blindly, but also not to ignore what God might genuinely be saying through others. The goal is to listen carefully, weigh what is said, and remain open to the God who still speaks. How do we know if God has given us a prophecy or if someone else speaks a prophecy they say is from God, how do we evaluate it?
 - Pete Grieb -**ABC filter: •Affirming:** Does this word fulfil the criteria of 1 Corinthians 14, by being strengthening, encouraging, comforting, edifying, and upbuilding? **•Biblical:** Is this word consistent with the broad teaching and witness of Scripture (not just a specific verse taken out of context—see chapter 2)? **•Christlike:** Is this word consistent with the character, mission, and message of Jesus?
 - This is how we obey v.21 - **but test everything; hold fast what is good.** We want to test what is said and cling to what is good- Affirming, biblical, and Christlike. And **Abstain from every form of evil.** Paul is saying, "reject whatever fails the test (anything evil, false, or harmful)."
- I have received prophetic messages at times and have given a few. I had a Word given to me about a specific situation I didn't see in the moment but that turned out to be clear years later. We'll practice seeking the Spirit to move and speak in our prayer time in a minute.

CONCLUSION

- It should not escape our notice that all of Paul's commands here are plural – addressed to the community. We need each other to live this out. In a big city, people often feel alone. But a church that prays continually together, rejoices together, and discerns the Spirit's leading together provides an antidote to urban isolation. And the church empowered by the Spirit with prophecy and all the gifts and fruits of the Spirit is the most powerful force on earth.
- This is an area our church needs to grow. We tend to box the Spirit in with intellectualism or fear and I am increasingly convinced the Spirit wants to be in extraordinary ways in our midst. But we can quench him, resist him, and grieve him if we tell him "no."
- We need to be ok with embracing the weird. The reality is Christians, at our best across history, have been weird...in a good way—loving our enemies, radical self-sacrificing love, enduring suffering without being losing hope, and proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God as the way God has saved us and brought us into his family... WEIRD.
- British historian and novelist Tom Holland (not Spiderman) is not a Christian but has researched how the early church grew to change the world was asked in an interview about Christianity if there

is anything he'd like to get off his chest. Pete Grieg recounted: "Without hesitation, Holland replied: "Oh, you need to talk more about the weird stuff!" by which I think he meant mystical experiences, speaking in tongues, gold dust at Bethel, healings at Lourdes, exorcisms, the Third Heaven, talking donkeys, words of knowledge, angels at the Chinese border, that kind of stuff.

"The thing is," he enthused (and I paraphrase), "the Church has been way too successful!" (at which point, everyone looked a bit surprised). "I mean, you kind of invented care for the poor, but now we have the Welfare State; your monasteries pioneered healthcare and education, but now we have the NHS and state schools; your Bible uniquely teaches human dignity - the ultimate value of every individual - but now we have the European Convention on Human Rights. The State has basically stolen all your best ideas. The only thing you have left - because they can't really take this from you - is the weird stuff. It's the supernatural claims of Christianity that unsettle cynics like me.

It's your weird stuff that makes us sit up and wonder whether you might actually be more than just a sort of metaphysical alternative to the Liberal Democrats."

- We want to embrace the weird parts of Christianity because we are called fundamentally to a supernatural life, full of the Spirit, empowered to live in a countercultural way in our work spaces, schools, and neighborhood.
- I want to invite you into a Spirit-filled prayer time. We want to use this passage as a guide for our prayer time.

PRAYER TIME-

- 1) **Practice God's Presence** – rejoice, pray, and give thanks... GOING TO TALK TO HIM OUTLOUD BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU DO WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE PRESENT WITH YOU. I've been married 31 years and still can't communicate with my wife through telepathy.... Jesus prayed in a loud voice. IF you never pray in a loud voice you are missing one way Jesus prayed. If you pray in a loud voice all the time, you're just rude. But we're going to pray outloud.
- 2) **Partner with the Spirit** – HS come, fill us, SPEAK TO ME... A word to share with someone? Might be an image you don't understand. Receive it and then I want you to share it with that person – "I feel like the Spirit gave me this...." . If someone gives you a Word of prophecy listen, thank them, and prayerfully receive it.

• New series in a couple of weeks – Pray Like Jesus- Walking through the Lord's Prayer.

• HOUSE OF PRAYER – JULY 12 at the 133.

PRAYER TEAM.... In the back corner and by the window.

- **COMMUNION** – Thankfulness in all circumstances honors Him and shifts our focus from what is wrong to the goodness of our Lord. The term "give thanks" in our passage is the verb form of the Greek word "Eucharist" – the term some Christian traditions use to refer to the Lord's Supper. It is literally an act of thanksgiving. Early Christians, even under persecution, were known for thankful worship. So we enter thankful for the gospel.

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