



## ***Giving Thanks Through It All***

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I was talking with a friend the other day about my son, Jonathan, who is passionate about cross country running. My friend commented that it is one of the few sports in which the whole point is to go out and make yourself miserable. After all, he said, the athletes aren't doing their job unless they run until they are completely worn out. It didn't sound like much fun to him.

Runners know, of course, and I'm sure my friend does, too, that there is a certain euphoria that comes with running, with "getting into the zone," pushing yourself to your limit and seeing yourself accomplish a little more and do a little better every day—most days, anyway. When you get your second wind during a run or recover after a run, you experience a feeling that lifts your spirit far above the challenge.

This euphoria is one of the things that enables runners and other athletes to endure such difficult circumstances and, indeed, often to endure them with a sense of joy. As one definition of euphoria states, they experience a state of "extreme happiness, sometimes more than is reasonable in a particular situation."

It sounds a lot like what the Apostle Paul is encouraging us toward in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 where he writes, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Are you kidding! In all circumstances, even more than seems reasonable in a particular situation?

"No, I'm not kidding," the Apostle Paul would respond, "*This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*"

Wow. Many of us have questioned what God's will is for us along the way. We often link the question to the big picture issues of our lives like what school to attend, what jobs to pursue, what volunteer activities to engage in, where to live, whether to marry or not, and so on. Yet, while these questions are good ones to wrestle with, in many ways it is the smaller, daily choices we make, the daily attitudes and actions we practice, that determine who we are and are becoming regardless of the answers to the big picture questions.

It is worth noting that the words "give thanks" come from the Greek word, "eucharisteo," which stems from the same root as euphoria. In contrast to euphoria, though, the Apostle Paul is not suggesting we should *feel* "extreme happiness, sometimes more than is reasonable in a particular situation." Rather, he is commanding us to "eucharisteo," that is, to *give thanks* more than may seem reasonable in a particular situation.

Why? Because we who "eucharisteo," that is, who *give thanks*, are people who celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, another name for which is the *Eucharist*. As you likely noticed, it has the same Greek root, too. We who celebrate the Eucharist give thanks to God as we remember Christ's death, a circumstance through which, against all odds and contrary to all human wisdom, God enabled grace and

life to break forth for us and for all. We are people who give thanks in all circumstances knowing that God's great resurrection power can and does work through every challenge, every difficulty, even death itself, for God's good and loving purpose in our lives and world.

**Prayer:**

God of the resurrection, we praise you for your steadfast love, your faithfulness to all generations, and your tender care for each and every one of us, including me. Forgive me for my lack of faith and gratitude. Fill me with a spirit that overflows with thanksgiving. Help me to trust your love and to practice putting my faith in you by giving thanks for your presence and loving power in every situation, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

**Suggested Verse for Meditation and Memorization:**

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

1 Thessalonians 5:18

**Things to Try:**

- Count your blessings. Seriously, right now. Take a moment, count them, and thank God for them.
- As you begin each day this week, thank God for five things you are grateful for as you look to the day ahead.
- As you end each day, thank God for five things you are grateful for as you look back on the day you just experienced.
- Go out of your way to thank someone who has blessed you.
- Take three minutes to look out the window and gratefully notice God's blessings. Notice the air you breathe, the warmth or cold you feel, the clothes you wear, the sights you see... notice and give thanks.
- Talk with God about the challenges you are facing, the worries you are dealing with. Balance your statements of concern with statements of gratitude for God's presence, power, and provision.
- Put an object in your pocket or in another place that will lead you to notice it occasionally through the day. Each time you notice it, take a moment to thank God for something – God's presence, something you enjoy, someone you are grateful for...
- Practice giving thanks to God this week knowing that whatever we practice becomes second nature.

**Further Suggested Readings:**

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- Colossians 3:12-17
- Luke 17:11-19
- Psalm 16