

Always Be Thankful

A number of years ago, I received a letter from some friends. They told me about problems that they were having with their oldest son. Among other things, he was involved in drugs and they said, "Please pray for our son." I wrote back and said, "I will be praying for your son", and I did. Things did not get any better, they got worse. This family wrote me another letter and they told me how the condition had worsened. Their son was not only involved in taking drugs, he also had become involved in selling them and they said, "Pray for our son", and I wrote back and said, "I will", and I did. Time went on and they wrote me again and said, "Now our son is stealing things in order to purchase drugs and he has been caught and put into jail. Pray for our son", and I did. Time went on and they wrote me another letter and they said, "Things are worse. Our son has now had a mental breakdown and is now in the mental hospital. Pray for our son", and I did. At that time, we moved to Chattanooga and I started ministering. These people were not members but right away they came and spoke to me. The father buried his face in his hands and he said, "I don't know what to do. I don't understand why God has not answered prayer." I

said to this father, "Have you ever thought about thanking God?" and he looked at me like I had lost my mind. I cited him this verse of scripture; Colossians 3:15 "always be thankful". I said, "I know it sounds ridiculous but the Bible says to do it anyway." I referred him to some other scripture like I Thessalonians 5:18, "in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." I also referred him to Ephesians 5:20, "giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." I pointed out Philipians 4:6, "be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that your request be made known unto God and then and only then will the peace of God keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord." This father said, "I don't feel thankful." I said, "I am not asking you to feel thankful. I am asking you to give thanks to God because this is the will of God in Christ Jesus." And he said, "That would be hard to do. My son has been in drugs, has been arrested for thievery, is now in the mental hospital, and you're asking me to give thanks?" I said, "Yes, that is what the Bible says. It says always give thanks."

We find it easy to thank God when things are good. When something good comes our way we say, "Praise the Lord", but I Thessalonians 5:18 says, "in everything give thanks." "In everything give thanks." We need to take this verse literally and seriously. "In everything give thanks unto God for this is the will of God concerning you in Jesus Christ." That means everything — good, bad, and indifferent.

As that father and mother sat in our parsonage three years ago, the father had his face buried in his hands and he said, "It is almost impossible for me to do that." I said, "Will you do it anyway?" He said, "I will try." The boy ran away and they called me immediately and I asked, "Did you give thanks?" and they said, "We are trying." He went into the Army and got hold of more drugs and I asked, "Did you give thanks?" and they said, "Yes, we are thanking God but we don't

understand.” Then the boy disappeared and they contacted me again by telephone and I asked, “Are you thanking God?” They said, “Yes.” Two weeks ago I received a letter from the father and mother and the letter started out, “Praise the Lord. Our son has returned in his right mind. He has a job and he is going to church. God has truly performed a miracle in his life. He has finally answered our prayers.”

Dear friends, I want to submit to you that I believe with all of my heart that it was only because they had faith enough to thank God in everything that God released His power in such a way that their prayer was answered. Any doctor, any psychiatrist will tell you that you will be a healthier person, healthier physically, healthier mentally, healthier emotionally, healthier socially if you will exchange thanksgiving for complaining.

Now I am convinced as I study the word of God that thanksgiving in everything releases the power of God into a situation and enables that situation to work out for your good and for God’s glory. I am also equally convinced that many of our dilemmas and difficulties and situations that we face are not being solved because we are trying to solve them ourselves instead of trusting God to do it.

I believe we limit God by our unbelief. You remember that Jesus entered into a certain city and the Bible tells us, a strange thing, Jesus could not do many mighty works in that place. Why? Because of their unbelief. In Matthew 17 when the disciples faced failure they asked Jesus, “Why did we fail?”, and Jesus responded, “Because of your unbelief.” The Bible teaches us that when we believe God by expressing thanksgiving, it is like putting gasoline on a fire. There is an explosion. When you express thanks to God in everything there is an explosion of divine power and God moves into action. My thanksgiving to God in everything releases the ability of God to work in my life in difficult situations. Thanksgiving in everything is the highest form of submission to the will of God. Thanksgiving in

everything is the highest expression of faith in God.

It doesn't take much faith for me to thank God and praise God when things are going good and smooth but when the clouds darken, when I cannot find my way out of the dilemma, then I began to praise God and thank Him anyway, this is the highest form of expressing my faith and confidence in God. That thanksgiving releases the ability of God in my life and is why the apostle Paul says over and over again "in everything give thanks". If you will take your concordances all the way through the Bible, I am sure that your Bible study will lead you to the realization that this is one of the most frequent commandments in the word of God.

If disaster comes into my life am I to be thankful? Yes, that is what the Bible says. If tragedy strikes my family, am I to be thankful? Yes, that is what the Bible says. When we find ourselves in situations where there is no escape and we are miserable and we have tribulation and there is sickness and persecution is being heaped upon us, we are to thank God. You say, "That is impossible." Yes, I agree, however, God never commands us to do anything that is beyond our obedience. We can do it by the power of the indwelling spirit.

I. Fact 1 — God controls every circumstance that comes into your life. Everything that comes to us must be strained through the filter of God's will. You say, "Wait a minute, Satan is our adversary. Can't Satan bring a disaster? Can't Satan even bring death?" Yes, he can do that. He has done it many times. He did it to Job for one example but remember that everything that happened to Job even though the devil did it it had to be strained through the filter of God's will before it reached Job. God was in control and is in control of the smallest detail. Jesus said, "The very hairs of your head are numbered and no sparrow can fall to the ground without the Father taking notice."

Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate and Pilate said, "Don't you know that I have the power of life and death?", and Jesus said, "You have no power except it be given to you of God."

The remarkable thing is that God gave Pilate power to crucify the Son of God. In I Corinthians 10 God states that one of the reasons that He destroyed so many Israelites is because they murmured. They complained. No circumstance comes into our lives except God allows it. Now please notice and don't misunderstand what I am saying. I did not say God caused it. I am not saying that God would cause anybody to be sick or that God would cause death or accidents or tragedy or that God would cause anybody heartbreak. I know the devil does all of these things but I am saying that God allows it to happen. Everything that happens even horrible tragedies God allows to happen and so for us to grumble and gripe would be for us to grumble against God because everything God has allowed and therefore strained it through the filter of His will.

II. God uses every circumstance to accomplish His purpose in our lives if we allow Him to do so. God's plan for your life is that you will be saved and that your life will be changed to conform to the image of Jesus Christ His Son so that you will be presented in His presence spotless and perfect. In Philippians 1:6 the Bible says, "Being confident of this very thing that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When Jeremiah went down to the potter's house, God said, "I want you to observe the potter." This is what I am trying to get you to do, observe the potter. God is the potter. We are the clay. The wheel is rolling and it is the wheel of human circumstance. God's hand is upon that wheel of human circumstance and He is using those things to create out of each one of us the image that He wants in our lives. If we will have the faith to accept these two facts, God is in control and God uses things to accomplish His purpose, we can start laughing at the devil. "Alright Mr Devil you brought sickness in my life, you brought difficulty to my life, but Mr Devil, you are not going to have the victory because you see, the Lord has the power to change this evil that you brought into my life and make it into good." II Corinthians 1:8 and 9 Paul gives an ex-

planation for all the trials that he went through. He says, "I have been distressed, I have been afflicted, I have been forsaken. Why? In order that God may keep me to trust Him." Did you know that the trials and difficulties that you are going through can be used by God to increase your faith and teach you to trust Him and God can even change bad things into good in your life and bring blessings if you will just have faith to thank Him in all things?

Do you remember Ruth in the Bible? It is one of the greatest love stories ever written. Talk about "when it rains it pours". Look at that poor girl! She married a fellow from a foreign land and then he up and died and left her a widow. Then there was a famine in the land that got so bad that she left and went with her mother-in-law to live in her country. She was poor and the only way she could make a living was by going out into the fields and becoming a gleaner. A gleaner was a person who after the harvest was past went through the fields picking up the leftovers. You would think that Ruth would have done a lot of complaining. "Why did God allow my husband to die? Why did God allow famine to come to the land? Why has God allowed me to be so poor that I have to go out and be a gleaner?" But, Ruth did not spend her time complaining. Ruth trusted God and so God was able because of the faith of this fine woman to accomplish His own purpose. One day while she was out in the fields gleaning, she met a rich man named Boaz who was a relative of her dead husband. They fell in love. She married Boaz. She became the grandmother of King David and thus the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In everything give thanks and if we will, we will release the power of God because when we give thanks in everything that is the highest form of faith and then we allow God to do a wonderful work in our lives.

Some months ago, Brother Vic Bond, a beloved member of Hickory Valley Christian Church, suffered a terrible heart attack. He was right here in church services Wednesday night

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when the heart attack began. His wife rushed him to Diagnostic Hospital where he lay critically ill for a long time. There appeared to be no hope. Time after time when I went to the hospital, his wife would tell me, "No hope!" When I would step into the room he was often too weak to even lift his hand to shake hands but the first words that he would always speak were these, he would say, "Thank the good people of the church for their prayers." Then if he had strength he would say, "I love everybody at Hickory Valley Christian Church." Then he would say, "I love my Savior. If I don't make it, it is okay because I know that I am going to heaven." Day after day all I ever heard from Vic Bond was thanksgiving. I believe that God was able to take a very hopeless situation and restore him because Vic expressed thanksgiving. It is God's command. It is God's will. It'll change your life. It'll release the power of God. It will change the church if in all things we give thanks regardless of the circumstance.

