

Give Thanks In All Circumstances!

Philippians 4:1, 4-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

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Perhaps you heard about it
The long lost painting by Leonardo DaVinci?
Leonardo da Vinci's painting, "Savior of the World," sold for
\$450,312,500 Wednesday at auction.
The price, "**the most expensive painting ever sold at auction,**"

Everyone clapped when it was sold and whooped it up
And on one level I was glad that the most expensive
painting ever auctioned off for 450 plus million dollars was
for a painting of Jesus.
I thought, "You deserve it Lord. You are so much more
worthy than any price tag we could ever put on you.

And then I got to thinking...my gosh...This is just a painting
of Jesus- of the Lord - a famous one of course
Long lost and recovered

But here in worship, in prayer, in fellowship, in Bible study, I
get to know the real Jesus – the real person of Jesus - who
is described in scripture as a pearl of great price
I get to be in touch with the real Jesus Christ for absolutely
nothing – a totally free gift
And I thought – why aren't I cheering – more than those
auction folks?
Why am I so dreary so much of the time?
I ought to be so grateful to know the Lord of life! I ought to
be cheering and rejoicing every day..1...I ought to be so
grateful all the time...

Now I don't know about you but gratitude is not my strong
suit.

When everything is going great I am on a role. God loves me, yes he does! Praise Jesus! All is well. God must be pleased with me because everything is going my way. That's when I am convinced that God is a good God and that everything is right with the world. (thumbs up image)

But what about when I just had a fight with a family member (that never happens at Thanksgiving, does it), I'm overdrawn at the bank, I have a migraine and work is stressing me out. Or as happened on Friday – I wake up with poison oak all over my face – yeah You can kind of see it....
(thumbs down image)

What happens then? Well I can begin to think thoughts such as "God doesn't care"..."God doesn't love me"...."Or even if he does love me, he isn't interested in all of my problems".....

God isn't aware of my needs...And we might stop praying, connecting with God in a meaningful way, and in the worst case scenario...we might even lose hope.

Here's what Paul says about this

"¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"

In What Way? What's he talking about? HOW DO WE STAND FIRM IN THE LORD??? Well Paul goes on to explain....

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Wow! What a promise for peace in our lives that is! I wish we could actually do this. It is so hard, but the crux of this truth...is...

1. We are meant to rejoice always

I Thessalonians 5:18 says it to, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

Rejoicing in all circumstances is God's will for you.

Let's say that together.

Rejoicing in all circumstances is God's will for me

Ever take that to heart?

If you are rejoicing you are doing God's will...Put another way

Ever wonder what God's will is?

It's to rejoice...

Let's do a little rejoicing ...Let's all say

“Thank you Jesus! Glory to God!”

It is counter intuitive to thank God for things that we don't like. But this is exactly what Paul is telling us to do.

C.S. Lewis tells us an interesting thing. He says

“God whispers to us in our pleasures; speaks to us in our conscience but shouts to us in our pain.”

C.S. Lewis *The Problem of Pain*

Is God shouting to you today in some circumstance?

I am here!

I am going to work this for good!

I will deliver you!

I care – I am at work on your behalf!

I will supply your needs!

Is God shouting TRUST ME! TRUST ME! TRUST ME!

In and through a circumstance in your life?

So often what happens on our faith journey is that
Unfortunate circumstances rise up to meet us.
As it rises up to meet us, the panic rises up in us.
How am I going to manage? What am I going to do?
The point is not that we are grateful necessarily for the
situation itself

**Our thankfulness and rejoicing comes because we have
brought the unfortunate situation to God and we have
decided to trust him with it...**

There was a time in my life when I was facing some really difficult circumstances. I had been hurt terribly by someone, unfairly treated, and I was completely devastated.

I went to see another pastor who gave me some wonderful advice. This pastor said, "Thank God ahead of time that he will be faithful to you in this. Discipline yourself to do it, even if you don't feel like it. If you can't do that...you shouldn't be a Pastor."

Hard words...maybe. But words I needed to hear.

And Guess what? God was faithful to me in that circumstance; and whenever I get into a tough place again,

I try discipline myself to say "Thank you Lord (growl) I don't understand this; this seems so hard...but I know Lord that you will be faithful to me in this one too..."

And I watch and I wait and I **make myself continue to rejoice.**

This is not easy.
This takes discipline.
It doesn't just flow out of me like a fountain.

Because I have a hard time trusting God when things are going wrong.

And I am not naturally a grateful person...

Here is a quote from Henri Nouwen that has helped me a lot...

"To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives – the good as well as the bad... – that requires hard spiritual work!

Still we are only grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for.

Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and TRUST that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God." Henri Nouwen

As Psychoanalyst Eric Erikson once noted, There are only two choices: integration and acceptance of our whole life story, or despair. Eric Erikson

And I don't know why God sometimes is so slow,
...sometimes by sheer will power we have to wait *way longer than we want to...*

Have you ever noticed that?

But growing in our faith, being mature Christians, means learning how to hang onto God's promises to the very last minute...

It takes training in the faith to be able to believe and rejoice in who God is, in the midst of difficulty. Its only those who are mature in their faith who can do that; who've been at it awhile...

Just like Jonathan (he came home and I couldn't believe the muscle on him) He can do things I could never do – because he gets up at five in the morning and works out with the baseball team every day.

He is in training, he works at the same drills over and over again.

It still isn't easy, but that whole team has developed strength in their body just because they keep doing the same drill over and over again

Training in the faith over time means *willing ourselves* to trust God more than whatever it is around us that is causing the problem...

As we thank God over and over, each time a circumstance hits us broadside, we train ourselves to have the spiritual strength to hang on to God's faithfulness with joy and not let go of it...

And as we hang on...sometimes it seems that we hang on until the very last minute...

Have you ever noticed that...**God is never in a hurry but he's always right on time...**

I remember long ago reading a book by Corrie Ten Boom who was a Christian believer but was put in a concentration camp in WWII for harboring Jews in her home
Corrie's father had a deep faith, and one time when she was doubting and anxious about the future he looked at her and said...

"Corrie...you don't need to be anxious. **God always gives you your ticket right before you get on the train."**

Believing that God will come through for us, even if its at the last minute...and rejoicing in this reality... is critical for being able to rejoice regardless of circumstances. Over time we will see that God is faithful again and again and again....

2.We are meant to bring everything to God ...big and small

"In every situation, by prayer and petition **WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known unto God."**

It says here EVERY SITUATION...not just some situations
God wants us to be specific in our prayers.
The things that are of concern to us, are of concern to God.
NEVER DOUBT THAT.

Being aware that what concerns us also concerns God

Its fine to pray for the world ...its good and noble, but it is also general and abstract.

What boosts our faith is when we recognize that God is concerned about it all... the big and the little.

The cosmic...and the particular
And what we consider "big and important" vs. "small and unimportant" is not necessarily how God measures things at all.

Someone shared a few years ago, how it seemed like a little thing, but that she had been having real pain in her index finger for quite awhile, and one Sunday after church, she came up to have it prayed for...(great thing to do!) and after she received prayer for her finger, the pain disappeared and it never came back.

Now maybe you might think world issues would be what God should be working on instead of someone's index finger.
But who are you to determine this?
When we declare that what God really should be most concerned about is A, B, or C... we are putting ourselves in the position of deciding what is most important, what is least important, and what God should or should not be doing!

What do we bring to God in prayer? It says right here in scripture...**EVERY SITUATION...**

In every situation, from an index finger to world concerns, God wants us to bring it to him...trusting him...believing in his faithfulness...and rejoicing in the truth that he cares and is at work.

Nothing is too small for God (invite you to come forward after worship for prayer...why cheat yourself out of a blessing because your problem isn't as bad as someone else's? All of it is important to God, and when you come forward and bring it to him, with the support of others you open the way for him to be involved...prayer opens the door for God to work in any and all things)

Also... when we are specific in our prayers, like this person was with their finger, then we can actually recognize the answer when it comes, and our faith in God's presence and love for us is strengthened.

And it's so much easier to rejoice in the Lord when we see our prayers answered!

My goodness...God cares enough to heal my finger?
Maybe next time when I ask God to help me with a difficult relationship in my life, I'll have a little more joy...a little more expectation...a little more hope and thanksgiving...and it will be easier to rejoice and expect Divine intervention.

The result of bringing every situation to God with thanksgiving is clear in Paul's words. He writes...that when we put our trust in God first, and rejoice in all circumstances
"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

St. Francis taught that in order to take care of the lack of peace out there, we must start with peace in here.
Is peace the result of having everything go our way?
No...not at all

An art competition awarded a prize for the best expression of peace. One painting depicted a deer and a fawn grazing at the skirt of a mountain meadow rimmed with pines and cedars stretching heavenward. Another showed a cat curled up in a basket, resting with all its being, as only cats can do.

But the first prize went to the painting of a tumultuous waterfall. (IMAGE) It was a violent waterfall....Torrents rushed downward, churning and crashing on the rocks below, sending spray shooting up into the air. Just above the waterfall, the artist had also painted a tree branch extended just above the mist, with a bird's nest in a fork. Safely within were the mother bird and two babies.

That's peace!. The ability to trust God in the most rushed, chaotic or violent circumstances.

Serene surroundings don't produce peace; nor does the absence of animosity

If peace depended on the setting, many could never find serenity.

Peace comes from finding Jesus...not just the painting but the real person, who is of way more value in our lives than 450 million bucks!

3. When we are grateful, it is contagious.

Finally, gratitude is contagious. John Kavanagh – professor - relates the story of a grateful old woman in an extended-care hospital.

She had some kind of "wasting away" disease with her different powers fading away over the march of the month. A student of mine happened upon her on a coincidental visit.

The student kept going back, drawn by the strange force of the woman's joy. Though she could no longer move her arms and legs she would say, "I'm just so happy I can move my neck." When she could no longer move her neck she would say, "I'm just so glad I can hear and see." When the young student finally asked the older woman what would happen if she lost her hearing and sight the gentle woman said, "I'll just be so grateful you come to visit me."

John writes, "There was an uncommon freedom in that student's eyes as she told me of her friend. Somehow a great enemy had been disarmed in her life."

A Brother – monk – David Steindl-Rast notes, **"The root of joy is gratefulness...It is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratitude that makes us joyful.**

We have so much to be grateful for folks, because we know and have experienced the love of Jesus Christ.
He has stepped out of a painting and become a friend
He has leapt from the canvass and made himself real to us
We have not found Jesus who was lost...like the painting...
and had to pay a price to gain him
Rather, this Lord of life - He has found us, and paid the price to redeem us, making us valuable in his sight...

He is our advocate, our Savior, our bright and morning star
Nothing can happen that he cannot redeem
Nothing can afflict us that he is not greater still
No circumstance we go through threatens him
No problem hangs heavy on his mind. Rejoice in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you!

GK Chesterton said ruefully one time that, **"the worst moment for an atheist is when he/she feels grateful and there is no one to thank."**
We know the One to thank. Let us live our Thanksgiving this day, and every day. AMEN