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MINISTRIES

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Give Thanks in All Circumstances

Have you ever wondered what God’s will is for your life? If so, you’ll be glad to know that the Bible gives a direct answer to that question. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul writes:

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] for you.

God’s will is that we give thanks in all circumstances. Not just happy circumstances. *All* circumstances. This principle also appears elsewhere in Scripture. For instance...

Psalms 34:1

I will bless the LORD [YHWH] at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Gratitude—being thankful—ought to characterize our lives as believers. But why is this so important? Why does Scripture instruct us to give thanks in all circumstances?

One reason is that gratitude honors God. And living God-honoring lives is our purpose as believers (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The opposite is also true: when we are ungrateful—when we complain and grumble—we dishonor God. In fact, Paul characterizes unrighteous rebels (Romans 1:18-20) as those who do *not* give thanks to God:

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God **or give thanks** to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

God is not a fan of ingratitude. He doesn't like complaining and grumbling. Consider how God responded to the Israelites who complained in the wilderness:

Numbers 11:1

And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD [YHWH] about their misfortunes, and when the LORD [YHWH] heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD [YHWH] burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.

Numbers 21:5-6

And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD [YHWH] sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

When we read about Israel's wilderness wanderings, we notice that complaining is a consistent pattern with them. They were just saved from slavery in Egypt and were on the way to claiming their inheritance. You would *think* they'd be more grateful. But again and again, they complain and grumble *about everything*.

They complain about being hungry, so God gives them manna—miraculous bread from heaven (Exodus 16:1-4). Then they complain about the manna (Numbers 11:3-6)!

They complain because they're thirsty (Exodus 17:1-4); they complain because they don't like Moses's leadership (Numbers 14:1-4); they complain because they're uncomfortable and don't like the food (Numbers 21:5), and on and on. They grumble about every inconvenience and trial they experience.

Now, it's easy to read about the Israelites in the wilderness and judge them for being miserable whiners. But how often do we act the same way? Just like the Israelites, we often complain about the very things we used to hope and pray for. We complain about God's blessings and provision.

For instance, we might hope and pray that God provides us with a job. When he does, we complain about it! "This job is unfulfilling!" "My boss doesn't appreciate me enough!"

We might pray that God would bring us our spouse. When he does, we complain about our marriage! "He doesn't do enough around the house!" "She's not a good cook!"

Many of us, particularly in the Torah movement, hope and pray that God would provide a godly community that we could be part of. When he does, we complain about it! "I don't like the style of the worship music!" "The teachings are boring," or whatever.

Just like the Israelites in the wilderness, we too have a tendency to grumble and complain about God's blessings and provision. This type of attitude dishonors God.

So again, gratitude is important because it honors God. And when we are ungrateful, we dishonor God.

Another reason that gratitude is such an important principle is that it often leads to treating people better. Ingratitude often leads to treating people badly.

Think about it: when we're grateful, we're happier and more inclined to be friendly. We behave more humbly and generously. To give an example, picture someone who has just won a prestigious award and is invited on stage to give an acceptance speech. We've seen this happen many times. Often such a person becomes overcome with gratitude. Then, they start expressing kindness to other people; they recognize everyone from their fans to their childhood art teacher, without whom they wouldn't have arrived where they are today. When we are genuinely grateful, we simply act like nicer people.

When we're ungrateful, we're more inclined to be angry and mean to people. Ingratitude breeds anger, resentment, and unkindness. A man who is dissatisfied with his work will frequently take out his frustrations on others. He might snap at his wife or be less patient and understanding with his children.

How do we overcome our impulse to complain and instead cultivate a life of gratitude? To answer that question, we first need to establish why it is that so many of us struggle with ingratitude.

The reason is that we have a sense of entitlement.

We complain because we think we deserve more and better than what we have. We have forgotten that what we actually *do* deserve is eternal condemnation (Romans 3:9-20). However, thank God that he *doesn't* give us what we deserve.

And that's the first step to cultivating a life of gratitude: recognize that we don't deserve anything good that we have. Every good thing is a gift from God.

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God.

Your salvation is a gift. You didn't earn it. You don't deserve to be saved; you deserve the opposite. But God saved you anyway because he loves you (Romans 5:8). He delivered you from slavery to sin and death and gave you a new life of freedom in him. It is a gift. On top of that, your job, your family, your faith community—these are also gifts from God.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

So, what do you do when someone gives you a gift? You're supposed to say, "thank you." You're supposed to have gratitude.

Whatever difficulties you're facing in life right now, consider the fact you've been given an amazing gift. How can you *not* be thankful? When we start from that foundation, we can give thanks in all circumstances. Gratitude becomes something we *choose*, even in the middle of difficult circumstances (James 1:2-4). No matter what we face, God is still good. He loves us and has saved us, even though we deserve only condemnation. What's more, God is behind the scenes of every situation, working out all things for the good of those who love him:

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Once we recognize that every good thing we have is a gift from God, a practical thing we can do to help cultivate a life of gratitude is to count our blessings. Keep a list on your phone or notepad and reflect on all the things you have to be grateful for. Write down even the little things that are often overlooked and taken for granted. For example, the fact that food tastes good is something to be grateful for! God didn't have to give us taste buds and make our brains release dopamine to make us feel good. But he did. Thank God!

Now, to be clear, God is not entirely against us expressing grievances. There is a context where expressing legitimate complaints can be done appropriately. For instance, we see complaints being made by righteous people in the Psalms and the Book of Job. But the thing to understand is that there is a difference between constructive complaining and destructive complaining.

Destructive complaining is just complaining for its own sake. This type of complaining is done on the basis of ingratitude and entitlement. It doesn't help the situation; it just makes everyone miserable.

In contrast, a person can be sincerely grateful for what he has, but still feel overwhelmed or disappointed by difficult circumstances and seek relief. A constructive way to handle such grievances would be to do what we so often see in the Psalms—that is, take those grievances to God in prayer. Believe that he cares about you and really is working things out behind the scenes for his glory and your good. When we take our troubles to God, we find peace:

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua].

Another thing we can do is talk to a close friend, a pastor, or a counselor, and get their guidance and prayer support. This is a constructive way to handle grievances because it's not complaining for its own sake. The goal of reaching out to others for help is to be strengthened and encouraged to move forward in peace and hope. One of the reasons God gave us community is so that we can support one another and help each other through difficult emotions and situations:

James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

So, the Bible instructs us to give thanks in all circumstances. Giving thanks is important because gratitude honors God, while ingratitude dishonors God. It is also important because gratitude leads to treating people better, while ingratitude leads to treating people badly. We often struggle to be grateful because we feel we are entitled to more than what we have. Overcoming ingratitude starts with recognizing that we don't deserve anything good—every good thing we have is a gift from God, not something we've earned or deserve. Cultivating a life of gratitude starts from that foundation.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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