

Give Thanks Always

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The idea of giving thanks is so intertwined throughout Scriptures that there are no loopholes. There can be no mistaking it – the biblical writers expect Christians to be thankful in all circumstances.

Here is what the Book says. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4). *Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything...* (Ephesians 5:19-20). *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

And these are just a few of the biblical references to being thankful. There are no loopholes. God expects us to be thankful in all circumstances.

That does not mean that we will always agree with what happens. Christians, just like the rest of the world, face disappointments, hurts, and injustices. The difference is that Christians are to trust that God is ultimately in control of things. When we give thanks in difficult situations we are saying, "God I trust you even when things are not coming out right. I trust you so much that I will react your way and leave the results in your hands."

Learning to be thankful not only blesses others; it also blesses us. People who learn to deal with injustice and pain without striking out at others gain inward peace and joy. An opposite of thanksgiving is nitpicking or nagging. Unhappy people always find fault. Unfortunately, it often poisons their families and worsens their situations so badly that in the end everyone suffers both the nitpicker and the nitpickee. As Galatians 5:5 warns, *"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other"*.

Since there are no loopholes for an ungrateful spirit, thankfulness is to be a part of all our situations – our homes, our work places, our schools, and even sporting events. There will always be bad calls at sporting events, even in the high school state football tournament. Fans who call out insults and curses on the referees obviously have not learned to give thanks in all circumstances. There is certainly a place for coaches to question calls, but fans who get worked up to the point of anger and profanity have no place in high school sports.

In the same way, there will always be bad calls in the rest of life. Sometimes we get unexpected blessings, but at other times we come out on the short end of things. The only way to be happy is to choose to be happy regardless of injustices, bad breaks, and disappointments. It is to say with St. Paul, *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"* (Philippians 4:12).

Recently someone gave me a tee shirt that says, "Have a nice day if you want to." What happens to us is not always up to us, but how we react is up to us. One of the best gifts we can give to those who celebrate Thanksgiving with us this year is the gift of being pleasant and grateful whatever happens. But grateful people do more than bless God and others. Choosing to give thanks in all circumstances also blesses us.