



ATWATER BAPTIST CHURCH

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances...”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a (NIV)

May 31, 2020

While preparing this reflection during this time of the COVID-19, I was so engrossed with the challenge of the verse that I pushed my computer back to think. Suddenly I heard the sound of rushing waters. What’s that? I asked. I lifted my laptop and saw a tipped-over empty cup, water on my desk, under my laptop, and flowing off the back of my desk down the wall and into the carpet below.

When I realized what was happening, I lifted my laptop onto high ground, and ran into the bathroom to get towels to wipe up the mess. Tracing the path of the water over the edge and onto the floor, I crawled under the desk and on hands and knees began blotting up my spill. Hands and knees. Disruption. Prayerful position! That’s when “give thanks in all circumstances” came to mind.

So, I gave thanks...to be given the opportunity to pray, as my mind turned back to the scripture and I thought “what a contrast: spilled water versus a pandemic!” And that is just one example of why we need to be exhorted to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. We tend to focus on the immediate, what needs tending to right now (usually problems) and lose sight of the big picture with God and His care for us.

Jesus helps us here when he says to make our relationship with God our primary priority (Mt. 6:33). How can we begin to see God at work when we put him in the back seat of our minds and lives? Rather, when we let God be God in our lives, we tend to seek him first, and the other matters get resolved.

Rejoice

So, as I was on my knees, the power of God struck me through an everyday frustrating situation. We can rejoice in God even when we’re stuck in circumstances we don’t like! “Rejoice” is to feel or show great delight.

Everyday examples include rejoicing at a happy, smiling little baby in his or her mother’s arms, a beautiful sunset over the ocean, snow-capped mountains on a crystal-clear day, or a sky lighted with stars on a rare and glorious night. But ultimately these examples bring us to our greatest delight, the Lord God. As Psalm 19 says *“The heavens declare the glory of God!”* And for that we rejoice!

“Rejoice!” Sometimes we need a reminder that we can choose what we focus on: our blessings in Christ, or the circumstances around us. And when we rejoice in who God is and what He has done for us we are inevitably led to prayer.

Pray

Simply put, prayer is talking with God. Pouring our heart out, seeking Him, seeking His will and direction. We can follow the pattern that Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13); we can use the classic A.C.T.S., Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication; we can pattern after prayers in the Psalms or follow a devotional guide, but the important thing is to pray. Prayers matter (James 5:16).

Give thanks

Many people feel house-bound, maybe a little cabin fever, from the health requirements of sheltering in place. In these circumstances we can lose sight of God in our lives. One of the ways to improve our spirits is the act of giving thanks. Not just a holiday in November, or something we say by rote over a meal, thanks, or gratitude, can be a powerful tool.

Right now, I encourage you to list five things you are thankful for. Let's assume for now we're all thankful to God for Jesus. I'll be an example (our lists will vary). I am thankful to God (1) for being able to read and write and share the Lord, (2) for waking up today, (3) for a body and mind that still work, (4) for my loving wife, family, and friends, (5) for life challenges that strengthen my faith and hope.

God's will

Why do we do these things: *rejoice, pray, give thanks*? Because "...*this is God's will for [us] in Christ Jesus!* And when we are in God's will there is a kind of peace that passes understanding and we have a hope that never fails us because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

May this meditation be a "cup of cold water" for you in Jesus's name!

Pastor John

P.S. Thank you for your faithfulness in giving of your tithes, gifts, and offerings. By God's grace we are continuing to minister and share the Lord even though we are not together in the sanctuary. Please continue to support God's work at Atwater Baptist, looking forward to the day we will be together again!

We are concerned for our congregation's health and safety during these days. We continue to monitor the Governor and Health Department's recommendations for opening and meeting together. At this time, we don't anticipate opening for worship in June, but pray that it will be soon. Stay healthy!

God bless you,

Pastor John