

“Tap-Tap-Tap”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

3/13/22 Epicenter/BAC

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Remember the classic video games, and how simple they were? Games like Pac Man, Pitfall, Asteroids, and Missile Command were really just simple diversions. Today there are many diverse genres of games, including sandbox, puzzle solving, sports, real-time strategy, and more. One of my personal favorites has always been role playing games (RPG).

A role is an identity that you take on for a period of time, like Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*, Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Terminator franchise, or Jennifer Lawrence in the Hunger Games movies. Some roles are more than just temporary, though. When you take on the role of a child of God, it is more than acting; it is part of who you truly are.

In RPG's, you don't usually have to do much problem solving; you generally are told where to go and what to do once you get there. But sometimes in real life, it can be difficult to figure out what to do. I mean, have you ever said (or just thought), "I don't know what God's will is?" If so, it may just be possible that you are skipping the most basic elements of God's will for your life. Just skip to the end of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which says, "**This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**" Could it really be that basic? That simple? That obvious?

I believe it is, and hopefully soon, you will also. I'll use a travel analogy to help explain what I mean. To start things off, to know and obey God's will for you, you must choose the right lens. When you wear colored or corrective lenses, it affects how and what you see. 1 Thess. 5:16 gives the imperative, "**Rejoice always.**" This is the 2nd shortest verse in the Bible (behind only John 11:35, which reads, "**Jesus wept.**")

God's plan is always good, but sometimes the road to get there is pretty rough. *Joy is sometimes an act of sheer will – choosing to rejoice rather than moping and complaining and comparing yourself to others.* Joy based on circumstances will always fail you, because circumstances will fail you – you don't get the job; he's no longer interested in you; they moved away; your health condition changes for the worse; you face an unexpected financial crisis. In those situations, what do you do? "PTLA" – Praise the Lord Anyway!

Everyone chooses a lens through which they see life, and that lens determines how they view, interpret, and respond to the events of their lives. As for you, let your lens be one of joy.

The second suggestion to know and obey God's will for you is to pack light. Packing light means less back pain, less waiting in line, and less likelihood you'll lose something (your mind, maybe?) We live in a world that can weigh you down with burdens; and you don't need to choose them – they will choose you, and they will find you. But good news! When you pray, you are talking with Jesus, who wants to reduce your burden, not increase it! Check out the following verses for more: 1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 55:22, and Philippians 4:6-7.

Maybe that's why 1 Thess. 5:17 (the 4th shortest verse in the Bible) reads, "Pray without ceasing." Imagine being on the phone with someone and never ending the call – just leaving it there so any time you wanted to talk to that person, night or day, you could, in an instant! Maybe that's what it means to pray without ceasing – to just live in a state of readiness to pray. It means never pressing the red ('End call') button.

Prayer is a blessing and an opportunity, but in *no way does any amount of prayer excuse you from Christian growth & service*. Every week, you should experience 3 pillars of Christian life: worship, edification, service. Pray. Yes; pray! Of course, pray! But if that's all you're doing, then both you and your church family are missing out on great blessings. Be ready to pray at any and every opportunity, and you will find your burden becoming lighter and lighter.

The third and final suggestion for knowing and obeying God's will for you is to pack light. The titular character in Ferris Bueller's Day Off famously said, "*Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.*" Have you ever missed something? Don't get so focused on problems that you miss the things you have to be thankful for. Don't get trapped in the downward spiral of complaining. *Complaining only amplifies problems, while giving thanks magnifies the Lord*. When it's raining, be thankful for the flowers; look for the rainbow. In a season of COVID, you aren't thankful for the interruption and impact the virus has had on your life, but you can choose to be thankful for medical professionals, right? You can be thankful that you can order online and pick up many basic necessities off your doorstep. You can be grateful for video conferencing and working from home, right?

This is not a guilt trip – don't stop here and say, 'Great! One more thing I have to do. Just what I needed!' It's not that we **have** to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. Rather, because of Jesus, we **get** to do these things. He gives you a new lens; a lighter burden; and many things to be thankful for. Indeed, as 1 Thess. 5:18 begins, "Give thanks in all circumstances..."

Reasons for gratitude may not be prominent, but they are always present. Sometimes it takes some looking before you do any finding. Find a reason to be grateful, no matter what your circumstances are. You may not like the circumstances of your life, but you can find something, somehow, to be grateful for in any circumstance. Note that this says in all circumstances" – not "for all circumstances." There is something to be thankful for in every situation, though it's not always the first thing that you may see.

Honest thanksgiving is when grateful lips speak the utterances of a grateful heart. God won't be fooled by your words if your heart is not in sync. You might have to look past a lot of raindrops to see the rainbow, but it's out there; keep looking; keep trusting; keep believing.

Being a child of God – a born-again believer in the risen Savior Jesus Christ – is the role of a lifetime. It allows you to rejoice at all times, to pray without ceasing, and to express gratitude in even the darkest of circumstances. It is less of an obligation and more of a freedom you have.

Have you been searching for God's will? Seeking the face of God? Longing to hear the voice of the Lord? How about if you try doing what 1 Thess. 5:16-18 tells you to do? If you think you are genuinely following God's will for you, but not doing these basic things . . . I don't know what it is you're doing, but it ain't following God's will. I submit for your consideration the following challenge: Be intentional about these three things (rejoice, pray, give thanks) for the next month

and see how your life changes. See if it becomes any easier to discern and follow God's will for your life.

Maybe you haven't ever gotten past this level at all. Like a video game, you don't advance to the next level or unlock the next content until you've completed the most basic things first, and 1Thess. 5:16-18 is as clear and basic as you can get. You don't graduate from the basics! In kindergarten, you learned $2+3=5$, and that's still true in the highest levels of mathematics. The basics permeate everything that is built upon them. Do you want to know what God's will is for you? Start with rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, and giving thanks in every circumstance, and you will find that discovering the rest of God's will becomes far easier than you may have ever thought.

Takeaways from this message.

Fulfilling the will of God for your life

Choose the right LENS

- Joy is sometimes an act of SHEER WILL

Pack LIGHT

- Continual prayer means never pressing the RED BUTTON.
- In no way does an amount of prayer excuse you from CHRISTIAN GROWTH & SERVICE

See the SIGHTS

- ❖ Complaining AMPLIFIES problems, but giving thanks MAGNIFIES the Lord
- Reasons for gratitude may not be PROMINENT but they are always PRESENT
- Honest thanksgiving is when grateful LIPS speak the utterances of a grateful HEART

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. When have you seen different people react very differently to the same event? What do you learn about 'lenses' from this?
2. When have you carried a burden unnecessarily? What kept you from casting that burden upon the Lord? Are you carrying a burden right now that you need to give to Him? What's stopping you?
3. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? How can you improve your prayer life in the coming year?

4. **If you were a video game character, who would it be and why**
5. **When have you been guilty of focusing too much on problems and not enough on your blessings? What advice would you give to someone who says they have nothing to be thankful for?**
6. **Explain how complaining amplifies problems, but giving thanks magnifies the Lord. Give a personal example.**
7. **What would you say to someone who tells you that the three imperative statements in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 are impossible to fulfill? Are they impossible? If not, what makes them possible?**
8. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**