

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶Rejoice always (be joyful always), ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I have been privileged to have had several final conversations with God's finest right before they die. It was not to be the last conversation I had with Jack McCarty, but it was the last week of his life. We were talking about the peace and joy of heaven. I said to Jack something like this, "I am jealous of you for where you get to be." He looked at me and said something like this. "Don't think like that. Be grateful for where you are and what you have here.

Growing up my mother tried her hardest to help me overcome one emotion that tended to drive my life. She would always say, "Honey knock it off." "Honey, don't be so sensitive." What she was referring to was the emotion of "self-pity." Honey, quit feeling sorry for yourself. And she would sing two songs, "*No body likes me. Every body hates me, I'm going to eat just worms.*" *Big fat juicy ones Eensie weensy squeensy ones See how they wiggle and squirm!* And then she would pretend to be playing a violin singing, "*My heart cries for you, cries for you, cries for you.*" Usually by the time she finished all of this we would be laughing, and I was no longer having a one-person pity party. As I grew up past 7 or 8 all she had to say was, Honey, knock it off." Self-Pity is ugly at best and disastrous at worst.

As I look over our country today, I sense we are having a national pity party. Everyone has a sob story to tell, feeling like a victim. People go on television and whine about how they have been sorely mistreated. When all that was done to them was a misspoken word that may have been true. Then they use it to their advantage and go out and get others to join in their pity party. I am not advocating meanness; I am speaking of the emotion of self-pity.

Whenever I hear the phrase, "Isn't it hurtful at what so and so said." I want to answer. It wasn't

hurtful at all. People use it as an excuse to vent their utter dissatisfaction over their own lives and always look to blame someone else for their lot in life that they have done to themselves.

I could write a book on self-pity based on personal experience. Still, I found this definition from Webster. Self-pity is *especially*: a self-indulgent dwelling on one's own sorrows or misfortunes.

Jesus was a man well acquainted with sorrows and griefs. He was despised and rejected, tortured, and remained obedient unto death. All the sorrows and griefs he experienced He would pour out to the Father in heaven. None of his sorrows or griefs deterred him from fulfilling his mission. Jesus also knew great joy. “Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.”

Sitting here tonight we have persons who have legitimate griefs and sorrows. We have unemployed people seeking employment. We have people living with tough illness and disease. We have people in grief and the grief is very real. I had a dream this past week of my mother telling me she did not know who our president was, nor did she know what day of the week it was. In the dream the realization of her Alzheimer's hit me, and I bawled like a baby in deep grief and sorrow. When I woke up my face was all wet. Yes, we do have legitimate griefs and sorrows and even good reasons to feel sorry for ourselves.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. **2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (NIV)** ⁸ *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.* ⁹ *Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.* ¹⁰ *He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,* ¹¹ *as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.*

I am firmly convinced on this Thanksgiving Eve that God Himself is far greater than any of our sorrows, pain, and grief. I know beyond a reasonable doubt that the resurrection power of God is here to raise us out of the pit of self-pity. The Bible says Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered. In our deepest sorrows and griefs God has the highest lessons for us to learn. God lifts us up from the valley to new heights and we soar as never before. **Isaiah 40:31 (NLT2)**³¹ But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

There is no self-pity pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still. I used to think holding grudges was my biggest sin. Now I know it is self-pity that keeps me holding on to my grudges. Get rid of self-pity and it is time to soar. For Christians our best days are always in front of us and never behind us. The best is yet to be.

¹⁶*Rejoice always (be joyful always).* Dr MacArthur writes, "Paul recognized the existence of negative human emotions like sorrow and distress. The apostle also knew believers must transcend their sorrows with a continual focus on true joy; they must be as he wrote himself, "sorrowful yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor 6:10) (1 & 2 Thessalonians 184). This is possible because true Christian joy comes from God and is not just some worked up positive inner attitude.

Christian joy flows from what the believer continually knows to be true about God, knowing God's plan is always to bring good out of whatever occurs. Christian joy is the inner confidence produced by the Holy Spirit that everything that happens to you is for your good and for the greater glory of God. When we live to glorify the Lord even in the midst of sorrow and grief, Christian joy becomes a great source of inner strength. Self-pity is going into a pit with

nothing there to help you. It is looking inward when God is saying, “I am much larger than your sorrow.” “I will lift you up as You learn of me.” Don’t crawl into yourself. Go to God who has the grace you need to meet every need.

Here is a list of why we have good reason to always rejoice.

1. God is holy and righteous and can never do wrong. **Psalm 28:7 (NLT2)** ⁷ The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.
2. The work that Jesus did for us and the gift of salvation is always something to rejoice about.
3. We can rejoice for we have received more spiritual blessings than we can count.
4. God orchestrates everything that happens to you for your benefit.
5. We have the promise of future glory that motivates us now to stay in the race and never give up.
6. We can rejoice how God has answered prayers and provided the sweet fellowship we have with God and Christian friends.
7. We have reason to rejoice as we rehearse the Gospel message to ourselves every day.

“Pray without ceasing” so writes Paul. One of my own personal goals as a Christian is always to be aware of God’s Presence. God’s Presence is always with us and in us and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Yes, there are times we sense God’s Presence, but we do not all the time. Every step I take, every word I speak, I am in the Presence of God and so are you. I interpret unceasing prayer as one’s posture toward God. There is a constant flow of communication to God in our thought life and we are open to receiving God’s inner promptings in how best to communicate what God wants said. Unceasing prayer is a never-ending flow of communication between you and God. It is always being aware of God.

The counselor asked the husband in front of the wife. “Sir, when you are gone all day long do you ever think about your wife?” Men if you are ever asked that question in front of your wife, be careful how you answer it. Us men compartmentalize. When we are at work we are thinking about our work. Men in general have difficulty multitasking. Women’s brains are different in that they have more connectors between the two brains and can multitask much easier. Women can be at work thinking about all the children, about dinner tonight, what she wore the first day of school in the 2nd grade, plus do her work flawlessly as she wonders how her husband is doing. This my point. It takes effort, actual work on our part for both men and women to train our brains to know the reality of walking with God every step of the day. It is called having a God awareness and God consciousness. It is called having an inner dialogue with God that never stops. We have our brain tuned into God. I don’t know how else to say it.

¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. On this Thanksgiving Eve I will close with this. You always have reason to give God thanks even in the worst of circumstances for God will work it all for your good and for the glory of God. We do not thank God for the evil of our day, but we thank God for the good that God will bring out of evil for that is God’s promise to us. There is no news so bad that God does not wish us to take it to him and thank God for His provision and grace that is there to see us through. What I learned in writing this sermon are the steps to take to get out of the pit of self-pity and onto higher ground. As Jack McCarty put it, “Be grateful for where you are and what you have here.” Don’t waist a moment of it. Amen and Amen.