

What You Might Not Understand About Thessalonians

I had the privilege of traveling to Thessaloniki, Greece, this year with a wonderful team of prayer partners from the U.S. We visited with our Greek Cru staff and were able to go with some of the Greek women to visit a refugee camp just outside the city.

Witnessing the suffering of the people who had escaped untold horrors in their own country, only to find themselves living in tents in a foreign country was sobering. Their suffering reminded me of the suffering of the Thessalonians whom Paul was instructing when he wrote, "Give thanks in all circumstances." The Thessalonian Christians had a lot to complain about. They, more than any other church that Paul established during his journeys, suffered for their faith.

The Thessalonians' story makes it tough for us to exempt ourselves from Paul's instructions. "All circumstances" clearly means "all circumstances." Our Thanksgiving should not be limited to the good things that come into our lives. Of course, it is good and important to stop and remember all those good things. That is what our traditional Thanksgiving Day is based upon. And that is a good thing. But what if things are not going well? What if we are facing very difficult circumstances, internally or externally? Can we also give thanks with the Thessalonians in that reality?

Giving thanks flows out of our humility and obedience. But then a miracle happens. As we give thanks, humbly, earnestly and by faith, we find that this act of thanksgiving actually frees us from whatever circumstance we might find difficult. Giving thanks raises our eyes from the trouble we are experiencing and opens us to the reality of God's sovereignty and love at work in our lives and in the lives of those we

love. As the psalmist observed, we enter God's gates with Thanksgiving.

As you gathered this year around your Thanksgiving table, I hope you gave thanks, regardless of what you are facing. Know that God is for you. He is with you. He is at work even in the midst of the most awful circumstances—not that He brings evil upon us. He is good and can only do good. He is a Redeemer. He buys back the evil that is done to us and makes it for our good. We can safely trust Him. And because we trust Him, we can give thanks. {eoa}

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