

# 1 Thessalonians 5:16 Commentary

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JESUS IS COMING AGAIN  
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 Chart by Charles Swindoll

1 Thessalonians				
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Exemplary Hope of Young Converts	Motivating Hope of Faithful Servants	Purifying Hope of Tried Believers	Comforting Hope of Bereaved Saints	Invigorating Hope of Diligent Christians
Written from Corinth Approximately 51AD				

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16 **Rejoice always** (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [Pantote chairete. \(2PPAM\)](#)

**Amplified:** Be happy [in your faith] and rejoice and be glad-hearted continually (always); ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Milligan:** At all times cherish a spirit of joyfulness

**NLT:** Always be joyful. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Be happy in your faith at all times. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Always be rejoicing. (Eerdmans)

**Young's Literal:** always rejoice ye

## **REJOICE ALWAYS: Pantote chairete (2PPAM):**

- 2 Corinthians 6:10; Philippians 4:4; Matthew 5:12; Luke 10:20; Romans 12:12
- [1 Thessalonians 5 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [1 Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoicing Always](#) - John MacArthur
- [1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice Always](#) - John MacArthur

## **A CHOICE TO REJOICE**

Notice that in the original Greek, the adverb is placed first, to emphasize when we are to rejoice - at all times, always.

As the title says **rejoicing is a choice**. While that is true, remember that our fallen flesh flees from this command to make the choice to rejoice. The only way to truly make this choice is to rely not on our selves, our "will power," but on the "will power" initiated and energized by the Holy Spirit, for as Paul teaches in Php 2:13NLT-note the Spirit is continually at work in us, continually energizing us and giving us both the desire to rejoice and the power to rejoice. It therefore behooves us to practice the presence of God the Spirit, to seek daily to begin the day filled with/controlled by His Spirit (Eph 5:18-note), so that we will be able to obey the command to walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-note). When we do that we are much more likely to rejoice when the trial or test comes!

See Related Resources on our continual need for the Spirit's enabling power:

- [See discussion of the Need for the Holy Spirit to obey NT commands](#)
- [Filled with His Spirit/Richly Indwelt with His Word](#)

In this last section of chapter five we find instructions on how to behave toward God. Hiebert refers to verses 16-18 as "principles for the inner life" for each of these passages deals with the believers life in relationship to God. Like a general speaking to his troops, Paul utters three crisp injunctions, which Moffatt calls "diamond drops"!

**Spurgeon** - Here follows a string of Christian precepts-a golden chain. You have always something to rejoice in; make the world ring with Christian music.

Denney writes that...

THE three precepts of these three verses may be called the standing orders of the Christian Church. However various the circumstances in which Christians may find themselves, the duties here prescribed are always binding upon them. We are to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. We may, live in peaceful or in troubled times; we may be encompassed with friends or beset by foes; we may see the path we have chosen for ourselves open easily before us, or find our inclination thwarted at every step; but we must always have the music of the gospel in our hearts in its own proper key. Let us look at these rules in order.

"Rejoice always." There are circumstances in which it is natural for us to rejoice; whether we are Christians or not, joy fills the heart till it overflows. Youth, health, hope, love, these richest and best possessions, give almost every man and woman at least a term of unmixed gladness; some months, or years perhaps, of pure light heartedness, when they feel like singing all the time. But that natural joy can hardly be kept up. It would not be good for us if it could; for it really means that we are for the time absorbed in ourselves, and having found our own satisfaction decline to look beyond. It is quite another situation to which the Apostle addresses himself. He knows that the persons who receive his letter have had to suffer cruelly for their faith in Christ; he knows that some of them have quite lately stood beside the graves of their dead. Must not a man be very sure of himself, very confident of the truth on which he stands, when he ventures to say to people so situated, "Rejoice always"?

But these people, we must remember, were Christians; they had received the gospel from the Apostle; and, in the gospel, the supreme assurance of the love of God. We need to remind ourselves occasionally that the gospel is good news, glad tidings of great joy. Wherever it comes, it is a joyful sound; it puts a gladness into the heart which no change of circumstances can abate or take away. There is a great deal in the Old Testament which may fairly be described as doubt of God's love. Even the saints sometimes wondered whether God was good to Israel; they became impatient, unbelieving, bitter, foolish; the outpourings of their hearts in some of the psalms show how far they were from being able to rejoice evermore. But there is nothing the least like this in the New Testament. The New Testament is the work of Christian men, of men who had stood quite close to the supreme manifestation of God's love in Jesus Christ. Some of them had been in Christ's company for years. They knew that every word He spoke and every deed He wrought declared His love; they knew that it was revealed, above all, by the death which He died; they knew that it was made almighty, immortal, and ever present, by His resurrection from the dead. The sublime revelation of Divine love dominated everything else in their experience. It was impossible for them, for a single moment, to forget it or to escape from it. It drew and fixed their hearts as irresistibly as a mountain peak draws and holds the eyes of the traveller. They never lost sight of the love of God in Christ Jesus, that sight so new, so stupendous, so irresistible, so joyful. And because they did not, they were able to rejoice evermore; and the New Testament, which reflects the life of the first believers, does not contain a querulous word from beginning to end. It is the book of infinite joy.

We see, then, that this command, unreasonable as it appears, is not impracticable. If we are truly Christians, if we have seen and received the love of God, if we see and receive it continually, it will enable us, like those who wrote the New Testament, to rejoice evermore. There are places on our coast where a spring of fresh water gushes up through the sand among the salt waves of the sea; and just such a fountain of joy is the love of God in the Christian soul, even when the waters close over it. "As sorrowful," says the Apostle, "yet always rejoicing." Most churches and Christians need to lay this exhortation to heart. It contains a plain direction for our common worship. The house of God is the place where we come to make united and adoring confession of His name. If we think only of ourselves, as we enter, we may be despondent and low spirited enough; but surely we ought to think, in the first instance, of Him, Let God be great in the assembly of His people; let Him be lifted up as He is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and joy will fill our hearts. If the services of the Church are dull, it is because He has been left outside; because the glad tidings of redemption, holiness, and life everlasting are still waiting for admission to our hearts. Do not let us belie the gospel by dreary, joyless worship: it is not so that it is endeared to ourselves or commended to others.

The Apostle's exhortation contains a hint also for Christian temper. Not only our united worship, but the habitual disposition of each of us, is to be joyful. It would not be easy to measure the loss the cause of Christ has sustained through the neglect of this rule. A conception of Christianity has been set before men, and especially before the young, which could not fail to repel; the typical Christian has been presented, austere and pure perhaps, or lifted high above the world, but rigid, cold, and self-contained. That is not the Christian as

the New Testament conceives him. He is cheerful, sunny, joyous; and there is nothing so charming as joy. There is nothing so contagious, because there is nothing in which all men are so willing to partake; and hence there is nothing so powerful in evangelistic work. The joy of the Lord is the strength of the preacher of the gospel. There is an interesting passage in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul enlarges on a certain relation between the evangelist and the evangel. The gospel, he tells us, is God's free gift to the world; and he who would become a fellow worker with the gospel must enter into the spirit of it, and make his preaching also a free gift. So here, one may say, the gospel is conceived as glad tidings; and whoever would open his lips for Christ must enter into the spirit of his message, and stand up to speak clothed in joy. Our looks and tones must not belie our words. Languor, dulness, dreariness, a melancholy visage, are a libel upon the gospel. If the knowledge of the love of God does not make us glad, what does it do for us? If it does not make a difference to our spirits and our temper, do we really know it? Christ compares its influence to that of new wine; it is nothing if not exhilarating; if it does not make our faces shine, it is because we have not tasted it. I do not overlook, any more than St. Paul did, the causes for sorrow; but the causes for sorrow are transient; they are like the dark clouds which overshadow the sky for a time and then pass away; while the cause of joy — the redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus — is permanent; it is like the unchanging blue behind the clouds, ever present, ever radiant, overarching and encompassing all our passing woes. Let us remember it, and see it through the darkest clouds, and it will not be impossible for us to rejoice evermore.

It may seem strange that one difficult thing should be made easy when it is combined with another; but this is what is suggested by the second exhortation of the Apostle, "Pray without ceasing." It is not easy to rejoice always, but our one hope of doing so is to pray constantly. How are we to understand so singular a precept? ([1 Thessalonians 5 - Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**James Moffatt** - To comment adequately on these diamond drops would be outline a history of the Christian experience in its higher levels.

**Rejoice** (5463)(**chairo**) means be glad, be joyful, be delighted. The present tense calls for the saint to continually be in a state of happiness and well being, something that is only possible as we surrender to the willing of the Holy Spirit, trusting in His supernatural enablement and not relying on our natural "strength" to pull this off (we can't!).

**Chairo** is used 74 times in the NT -

Matt. 2:10; 5:12; 18:13; 26:49; 27:29; 28:9; Mk. 14:11; 15:18; Lk. 1:14, 28; 6:23; 10:20; 13:17; 15:5, 32; 19:6, 37; 22:5; 23:8; Jn. 3:29; 4:36; 8:56; 11:15; 14:28; 16:20, 22; 19:3; 20:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 11:23; 13:48; 15:23, 31; 23:26; Rom. 12:12, 15; 16:19; 1 Co. 7:30; 13:6; 16:17; 2 Co. 2:3; 6:10; 7:7, 9, 13, 16; 13:9, 11; Phil. 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10; Col. 1:24; 2:5; 1 Thess. 3:9; 5:16; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 Jn. 1:4, 10f; 3 Jn. 1:3; Rev. 11:10; 19:7.

There are 30 uses of **chairo** in the Septuagint (LXX) -

Gen. 45:16; Ex 4:14, 31; 1 Sam. 19:5; 1 Ki. 4:20; 5:7; 8:66; 2 Ki. 11:14, 20; 20:13; Esther 8:12, 15; Ps. 96:12; Prov. 2:14; 6:16; 17:19; 23:25; 24:19; Isa. 13:3; 39:2; 48:22; 57:21; 66:10, 14; Jer. 7:34; 31:13; Lam. 1:21; 4:21; Ezek. 7:12; Hos. 9:1; Joel 2:21, 23; Jon. 4:6; Hab. 1:15; 3:18; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 4:10; 9:9; 10:7;

I love **Luke's** description of **Peter**, et al, after imprisonment for proclaiming Jesus and defending themselves before the Jewish Sanhedrin...

Acts 5:41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, **rejoicing** that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Both **Matthew** and **Luke** record the command to rejoice in persecution...

Matthew 5:11 (see notes) "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. 12 **Rejoice**, (present imperative = as your lifestyle) and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 6:22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 **Be glad** (aorist imperative = Do this now!) in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

**Paul** gives a similar command to the Philippians...

Philippians 4:4 (see notes) **Rejoice** (present imperative = as your lifestyle) in the Lord always; again I will say, **rejoice** present imperative = as your lifestyle)!

**Stedman** comments that **rejoice**...

perhaps ought to be translated, "Be cheerful." Do not let things get you down. Society is filled with despair and gloom. I have had several phone calls this week from people who are at the end of themselves. The pressures under which we live today can do this. But a Christian has an inner resource. Therefore, we can obey the word of James, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials and temptations," {cf, James 1:2}. Do not take it as an attack upon you. Do not moan and groan and say, "What have I done to deserve this sort of thing?" But rejoice, because it is good for you. Trials make you grow up, make you face yourself and learn things about yourself you did not know. That is what James goes on to say, "That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing," {James 1:4b RSV}. ([1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 Loving Christianly](#))

Believers can rejoice always because their joy isn't based in circumstances, but on God. Circumstances change, but God never changes (cf Malachi 3:6 "*For I, the LORD, do not change...*").

The **present imperative** is a command (imperative mood) calling for for all the saints at Thessalonica **rejoice** is second person plural) to continually (present tense) make a personal choice (active voice) to rejoice. Yes, it is a choice we must make (see Phil 2:12-note), but one that is only possible to make as we learn to lean on the empowerment of the indwelling Spirit, Who gives us the desire and the power (see Phil 2:12NLT-note) In sum, this command is an appeal to the will of the saints at Thessalonica. And it served as a reminder to them (and to all believers) that they had a part in maintaining this experience of joy - the choice to rejoice. Paul charged them not to allow adverse circumstances to rob them of their joy. Once again we see that mysterious balance of **human responsibility** and **divine sovereignty**, (Jerry Bridges calls this "dependent synergism") as Paul so well described in Philippians...

**Work out** (present imperative; middle voice - make the choice to do this continually) your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work (energeo - continually energizing you - present tense) in you, both to will (continually giving you the "want to" to choose to rejoice) and to work (present tense - continually energizing that choice) for His good pleasure (see **notes** Philippians 2:12; 13)

Paul's command is even more surprising in view of the suffering they had already endured...

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in **much tribulation** with the joy of the Holy Spirit (See note 1Thessalonians 1:6)

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, (See note 1Thessalonians 2:14)

We sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. (See note 1Thessalonians 3:2; 3:3; 3:4)

**How could the Thessalonians obey this command?** Paul tells us in 1Thes 1:6, explaining that the source of the joy was not their efforts to keep a joyful outlook but was the joy produced by the Spirit Who indwelt them. It was supernatural joy which Paul explained was...

the fruit of the Spirit (which) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (see note Galatians 5:22)

**Hiebert** writes that

A Spirit-prompted attitude of rejoicing unlocks the whole of a believer's nature; it influences his outward conduct and stimulates his affections and desires...Paul held that joy was a distinctive and abiding characteristic of the Christian. But Paul was no blind optimist. He well knew that in leading the Thessalonians to faith in Christ he had shared with them a heritage of suffering (1Th 3:2, 3-see notes 1Th 3:2; 3). But he also knew that suffering for the Lord was not incompatible with rejoicing in the Lord. He could testify to the paradoxical experience of joy amid sorrow and suffering (2Co 6:10)...It was the exhibition of this joy amid suffering that was one of the distinctive features of the early Christian church, amazing the heathen world, and drawing many to Christ.

Paul's explanation for the unnatural paradox of joy in suffering is found in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians

For I consider that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worthy to be compared with **the glory that is to be revealed to us**. (see **note** Romans 8:18)

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. **17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison**, **18** while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2Corinthians 4:16-18)

Paul had learned the secret as he explained to the saints at Philippi...

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. **12** I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. **13** I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (See **notes** Php 4:11; 12; 13)

In his letter to the Colossians **Paul** wrote...

Now I **rejoice** (present tense = continually; active voice = personal choice to rejoice) in my **sufferings** for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. (see note Colossians 1:24) (**Comment:** Sufferings for His Name sake, but not in any sense with an atoning value [payment for sin], for Christ death paid the penalty in full once and for all time.)

In short, Paul had learned the secret that sorrow and suffering voluntarily endured for Christ open a new spring of joy. The NT teaches that the believer's joy is not dependent upon external circumstances but springs out of the fact that we are **in Christ** (note) and rooted in the blessings which flow from that mystical union. Believers have ample reason to rejoice even amid unfavorable circumstances for they can know that their sins have been forgiven (past), that they are being conformed into the image of God's Son (present) and that they possess a sure hope of a glorified body throughout eternity with Christ (future).

**Always** (3842)(**pántote** from **pás** = all + **tóte** = then) is an adverb of time meaning at all times. **Why always?** Because as noted above the believer's joy originates not naturally from "happy" happenings but supernaturally, independent of circumstances and dependent on Christ our Example, "Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (He 12:2 - note)

**Rejoicing** can be in and concerning one's circumstances, but ultimately should be in God and His promises, because the people around us (and us included) can be (will be) unruly and fainthearted and weak and antagonistic. Such people would make an ordinary (natural, in Adam) person angry and sullen and discouraged. But we as believers (supernaturally, in Christ) have our roots planted somewhere else and are drawing up the sap of joy from a source that cannot be depleted (cf Ps 1:2, 3-notes), the river of God and his Word which the Spirit takes and uses to transform our thinking and our response to adverse circumstances and uncomfortable people. What is the key to rejoicing or delighting? You have to go no further than the next verse (remember **context** is king in interpretation!)

**Robert Morgan** selected 1 Thessalonians 5:16 as one of his top 100 verses to memorize and in his book which I highly recommend to help you store God's Word in your heart he writes...

Our next three verses, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, comprise one of the shortest paragraphs of the Bible, yet this sliver of a passage has the ability drastically to improve our temperaments. It's no accident they appear near the end of 1 Thessalonians. Thumb through Paul's letters in the Bible; notice how often he grows succinct and aphoristic near the end of his books, as he runs out of parchment. I love the pithy wisdom that marks the conclusions of his letters. At the end of 1 Thessalonians, for example, he starts "bullet-pointing" his advice like this:

- 16 Rejoice always!
- 17 Pray constantly.
- 18 Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- 19 Don't stifle the Spirit.
- 20 Don't despise prophecies,
- 21 But test all things. Hold on to what is good.
- 22 Stay away from every form of evil.

Verse 16 ("Rejoice always!") is the shortened form of Philippians 4:4 ("Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it

again: Rejoice!") The Greek word refers to the uplifting, ongoing, cheerfulness of the Christian. Joy is the helium of the heart that makes us airborne. It's the corklike quality of our souls that keeps us buoyant.

Sadness and sorrow befall us in life. Tears come. Disasters strike. But by and large, the default attitude of the believer is the joy of the Lord. That's the natural "setting" of the Christlike person. Uplifting, outgoing cheerfulness. Gladness.

I once read of a man who smelled good wherever he was and whatever he was doing. His very skin seemed to exude a pleasant fragrance. He worked in a perfume factory, and he breathed the aromas every day. They filtered into his clothing, penetrated his skin, and even filled his lungs. He became a walking perfumery.

That should be happening to us. As biblical joy pervades one's personality, it puts a smile on the face, a sparkle in the eye, a bounce in the step, a warmth in the voice, a confidence in the heart, and a composure in the demeanor. It should exude from us like the essence of the Savior. The joy of the Lord is the strength of our lives.

Rejoice sometimes? Rejoice always!

There's no excuse for not memorizing this verse. It's the shortest in the Bible. As a child, I was told that John 11:35 ("Jesus wept") was the Bible's smallest verse. That is the shortest verse in the English Bible. But in the Greek New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is even shorter. In a sense we have two shortest verses in the Bible. In the Greek, it is "Rejoice always," and in our English Bibles, it's "Jesus wept." Quite a contrast, isn't it—weeping and rejoicing? But how appropriate! Because Jesus wept, we can rejoice. Because He bears our sorrows, we experience His joy. God pays in joy that is fireproof, famine-proof and devil-proof. —Billy Sunday ([100 Bible Verses Everyone Should Know by Heart](#) - Recommended Resource)

A morning thought on **1 Thessalonians 5:16+** - **Rejoice always (Leviticus 23:40)** you shall rejoice before the LORD your God)

This is a command to make this our lifestyle, our daily practice. Are you rejoicing as you read this note? What would happen if we began our day rejoicing in the Lord and to the Lord and again I will say, rejoice! (Php 4:4-note)? The other question of course is how is this even possible? Beloved, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE! At least not in dependence upon our own human strength, our rotten, fallen flesh. The last thing the fallen flesh will impel us to do is to rejoice -- To criticize? Yes. To complain? Yes. To withhold forgiveness? Yes. To hold a grudge? Yes. But to rejoice? No! But what is IM-possible is HIM-possible. The Holy One in us is continually energizing us, giving us the desire and the power to rejoice always (see Php 2:13NLT-note). Will you surrender your will this morning to the sweet will of the Spirit of Jesus in you? He, and He Alone, can enable supernatural rejoicing from a heart filled with/controlled by Him (note), by His Spirit. Believe it beloved. If necessary...Confess. Repent. Forget what lies behind. Walk forth rejoicing, because no matter the circumstances today, our tomorrow is as bright and certain and joy filled as the Scars on the eternal inscribed on the hands of our Redeemer Jesus Christ (cf Rev 5:6±; Rev 5:12±, Isa 49:16+).

Spurgeon writes that...

This is a sunny precept. When we read it we feel that the time of the singing of birds has come. That joy should be made a duty is a sure token of the blessedness of the New Covenant. Because Jesus has suffered, we are encouraged, commanded, and enabled to rejoice. Only the Man of Sorrows and his chosen apostles can teach for a precept such a word as this — **Rejoice evermore**. Happy people who can be thus exhorted! We ought to rejoice that there is a command to rejoice. Glory be unto the God of happiness Who bids His children be happy. While musing on this text, I seem carried in spirit to the green woods, and their bowers. As in a dell all blue with hare-bells, where the sun smiles down upon me through the half-born oak leaves, I sit me down, and hear the blessed birds of the air piping out their love-notes: their music saith only this — **Rejoice evermore**. All that I see, and hear, and feel, surrounds me with garlands of delight; while the fairest of all the shepherds of Sharon sings to me this delicious pastoral — **Rejoice evermore**. The very words have breathed spring into my soul, and set my heart a blossoming. Thus am I also made to be as a daffodil which long has hidden away among the clods, but now at last ventures to uplift her yellow lily, and ring out her golden bell. Who can be sad, or silent, when the voice of the Beloved saith **Rejoice evermore**?

Our apostle speaks of rejoicing as a personal, present, permanent duty to be always carried out by the people of God. The Lord has not left it to our own option whether we will sorrow or rejoice; but he has pinned us down to it by positive injunction — **Rejoice evermore**. He will have this cloth of gold spread over the whole field of life. He has laid down as first and last, beginning, middle and end — **Rejoice evermore**. Some things are to be done at one time, some at another; but rejoicing is for all times, for ever, and for evermore, which, I suppose, is

more than ever, if more can be. Fill life's sea with joy up to highwater mark. Spare not, stint not, when rejoicing is the order of the day. Run out to your fall tether; sweep your largest circle when you use the golden compasses of joy.

Some things being once done are done with, and you need not further meddle with them; but you have never done with rejoicing. **Rejoice evermore...**

The command to rejoice is set in the midst of duties; it is put there to teach us how to perform them all.

Also notice that our text comes after just a flavoring of trouble and bitterness. Read verse fifteen: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man." Children of God are apt to have evil rendered to them. They may have slanderous reports spread about them: they may be accused of things they never dreamed of: they may be cut to the heart by the ingratitude of those who ought to have been their friends; but still they are bidden, "rejoice evermore." Even rejoice in the persecution and in the slander. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." So says our Lord. "Rejoice ye," he says, "and be exceeding glad." There is an expression in the Greek that never has been rendered into English, and never will be — agalliasithe. Old Trapp half puns upon the agalliasithe as he says, "dance a galliard." I do not know what a "galliard" was, but I suppose that it was some very joyous kind of dance. Certainly we know of no better way of translating our Lord's word than by — exult, or leap for joy. Even when your good name shall be tarnished by the malice of the wicked, then you are to leap. When are you to be wretched? Surely despondency is excluded. If slander is to make us dance, when are we to fret? Suppose some other kind of trial should come upon you, you are still to rejoice in the Lord always. The dearest friend is dead: "rejoice evermore." The sweet babe is sickening, the darling of your household will be taken away: "rejoice evermore." Trade is ebbing out, prosperity is disappearing from you, you may even be brought to poverty; but, "rejoice evermore." Your health is affected, your lungs are weak, your heart does not beat with regularity, very soon you may be sick unto death; but, "rejoice evermore." Shortly you must put off this tabernacle altogether! Tokens warn you that you must soon close your eyes in death; but, "rejoice evermore." There is no limit to the exhortation. It is ever in season. Through fire and through water, through life and through death, "rejoice evermore."

Now and then a commentator says that the command of our text must mean that we are to be in the habit of rejoicing, for there must necessarily be intervals in which we do not rejoice. It is to be "constant but intermittent": so one good man says. I do not know how that can be, though I know what he means. He means that it ought to be the general tenor of our life that we rejoice: yet he evidently feels that there must be black clouds now and then to vary the abiding sunshine. He warns us that there will be broken bits of road where as yet the steam roller has not forced in the granite. But that will not do as an interpretation of the text; for the apostle expressly says, "Rejoice evermore": that is, rejoice straight on, and never leave off rejoicing. Whatever happens, rejoice. Come what may, rejoice. If the worst darkens to the worst — if the night lowers into a sevenfold midnight, yet "rejoice evermore." This carillon of celestial bells is to keep on ringing through the night as well as through the day. "Rejoice, rejoice, ye saints of God at every time, in every place, and under every circumstance. Joy, joy, for ever. Rejoice evermore. In the midst of a thousand duties, amid the surges of ten thousand trials, still rejoice." There is to be about the Christian a constancy of joy. (Read the full message [Rejoice Evermore](#))

**Keener** notes that...

Greek ethics often listed succinct statements one after another as Paul does here. Many biblical psalms associate rejoicing with celebration and worship (e.g., Ps 9:14; 33:1; 47:1; 95:2; 149:1, 2, 3, 4, 5); here it is thus naturally linked with prayer and thanksgiving. ([Keener, Craig: The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. 1994. IVP](#))

In verse 17, Paul commands us to "Pray without ceasing." And then he follows up in verse 18, by commanding us to **give thanks** not for some things but for all things! So how can we continually rejoice? At least part of the answer seems to be that continual prayer and thanksgiving provides the soil in which rejoicing can grow and flourish. We observe a similar sequence of joy rooted in prayer in Philippians. (Php 4:3, 4, 5, 6-See **notes** Php 4:3; 4:4; 4:5; 4:6)

In his prayer for the Colossians, Paul gives us a clue how saints today can **rejoice** and **give thanks** in **all things** as he prays that they might be

strengthened (passive voice = literally **being** strengthened = the effect comes from an outside source, ie, the grace God supplies)

with **all** power (**dunamis**), according to His glorious might (kratos), for the attaining of **all steadfastness** (hupomone) and **patience** (makrothumia); **joyously (charas) giving thanks** to the Father (see **notes** on Colossians 1:11, 12) (Note the "**all's**")

In his comments on Habakkuk **Wiersbe** writes...

I will rejoice in the Lord" (Hab 3:17, 18). By the time Babylon was through with the land of Judah, there wouldn't be much of value left (Hab 2:17). Buildings would be destroyed, treasures would be plundered, and farms and orchards would be devastated. The economy would fall apart and there would be little to sing about. But God would still be on His throne, working out His divine purposes for His people (Ro 8:28-note). Habakkuk couldn't rejoice in his circumstances, but he could rejoice in his God!

The prophet's testimony here reminds us of Paul's admonitions to Christians today: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1Thes 5:16-18, NKJV). Habakkuk discovered that God was his strength (Hab. 3:19) and sang as well as his salvation (see Isa 12:1, 2; Ex 15:2; Ps 118:14); and therefore he had nothing to fear.

It's one thing to "whistle in the dark" and try to bolster our courage, and quite something else to sing about the eternal God who never fails. Though his lips were trembling and his legs were shaking (Hab 3:16, NIV), the prophet burst into song and worshiped his God. What an example for us to follow! It reminds us of our Lord before He went to the cross (Mark 14:26), and Paul and Silas in the Philippian dungeon (Acts 16:19-34). God can give us "songs in the night" (Ps 42:8; 77:6; Job 35:10) if we'll trust Him and see His greatness. (Bible Exposition Commentary - Old Testament)

**Milligan** writes of "An interesting example of the spirit of joy ruling in the early Church is afforded by the names found in the inscriptions—Victor, Nice, Gaudentius, Gaudiosus, Hilaris, Hilaritas ([1 Thessalonians 5 Commentary](#))

**Rob Morgan** - Pray constantly is midway through a trilogy of tiny, personality-altering verses at the end of 1 Thessalonians. Millions have memorized this verse from the King James Version, as "Pray without ceasing," wondering if it's really possible to do that. It is... when we understand:

Prayer is a practice to cultivate. To pray constantly means prayer is recurrent, something we keep doing incessantly and frequently, a perpetual pattern, not constantly occurring but consistently recurring. If we read through 1 Thessalonians, by the time we get to this verse, we'll have noticed several prior references to the habit. Paul began the book saying, "We always thank God for all of you, remembering you constantly in our prayers." In chapter 2 he said, "We constantly thank God, because... you received the message." He added in chapter 3, "We pray earnestly night and day to see you face to face." Paul wasn't literally on his knees around the clock, but his prayers were frequent and recurrent.

Prayer is a presence to enjoy. Prayer isn't just a pattern; it's a Presence. If you've traveled alone, especially overseas, you may know about hotel loneliness. Some people live with lonesomeness all the time. A constant awareness of God's presence is a shaft of light in a lonely room. Jesus Himself testified to this on two occasions in the fourth Gospel. In John 8:16, He said, "I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me judge together." And in the upper room just before His arrest and crucifixion, He said, "The time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me" (John 16:31-32 NLT, emphasis mine in both verses).

When we cultivate a consciousness and subconsciousness of God's abiding presence, it becomes natural to speak to Him spontaneously through the day. We learn to pray as we walk on the greenways and drive down the highways. We start and close the day with a word of prayer. We pause to pray before meals and after meetings. We never endeavor anything of significance without breathing a word of prayer or praise.

That's a practice to cultivate and a Presence to enjoy. And that's how we pray without ceasing.

In his classic book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Andrew Murray draws a line between this verse and Hebrews 7:25, which says Christ "ever lives to make intercession" for us. "It is... the sight of the ever-praying Christ as our life that enables us to pray without ceasing," wrote Murray. "Because His priesthood is the prayer of an endless life... praying without ceasing can become to us nothing less than the life-joy of heaven." (100 Bible Verses Everyone Should Know by Heart)

**Spurgeon** declared...I am bound to mention among the curiosities of the churches, that I have known many deeply spiritual Christian people who have been **afraid to rejoice**....Some take such a view of religion that it is to them a sacred duty to be gloomy. Turn this book over and see if there be any precept that the Lord has given you in which He has said, '**Groan** in the Lord always, and again I say **groan**.' You may groan if you like. You have Christian liberty for that; but, at the same time, do believe that you have larger liberty to rejoice, for so it is put before you.

**John Piper** - **What does it mean to pray without ceasing?** I think it means three things. **First**, it means that there is a spirit of dependence that should permeate all we do. This is the very spirit and essence of prayer. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the heart of faith. In that sense, we "pray" or

have the spirit of prayer continuously. **Second**—and I think this is what Paul has in mind most immediately—praying without ceasing means praying repeatedly and often. I base this on the use of the word "without ceasing" (adialeiptos) in Romans 1:9, where Paul says, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you." Now we can be sure that Paul did not mention the Romans every minute of his prayers. He prayed about many other things. But he mentioned them over and over and often. So "without ceasing" doesn't mean that verbally or mentally we have to be speaking prayers every minute of the day. But we should pray over and over and often. Our default mental state should be: "O God ..." **Third**, I think praying without ceasing means not giving up on prayer. Don't ever come to a point in your life where you cease to pray at all. Don't abandon the God of hope and say, "There's no use praying." Go on praying. Don't cease. So the key to delight in the Word of God is to pray continually—that is, to lean on God all the time. Never give up looking to him for help, and come to him repeatedly during the day and often. Make the default mental state a Godward longing. ([1 Thessalonians 5:12-18](#))

**Ray Pritchard - Pray Without Ceasing, "Never stop praying" (Phillips), "Pray all the time" (MSG).** Of the three "standing orders," (1Thes 5:16-18) this one causes the most problems. What does it mean to pray "without ceasing"? Should every thought and every spoken word be a prayer directed to the Lord? In a sense, of course, the answer is yes. If prayer is viewed broadly, then our life itself ought to be a prayer offered to the Lord. And that certainly is one part of the answer. Years ago I heard a speaker compare "praying without ceasing" to a net used to catch fish. When a net functions properly, it lets the water flow through while catching the fish, but if there is a hole in the net, the fish go free. The same is true when we pray. There are to be no "holes" in our "prayer net." This means praying often and in a deliberate fashion. It also means staying in communion with the Lord so that we don't have to suddenly change in order to begin praying. Our default spiritual condition should be, "O God . . ." It's like having a phone connection open 24 hours a day so you don't have to punch numbers. You just start talking. We stay in a state where we can pray all the time, everywhere, about everything. There is nothing we face, no duty too small that it would not be improved by our prayers. We are to pray . . .

If prayer is viewed broadly, then our life itself ought to be a prayer offered to the Lord.

- Consciously,
- Deliberately,
- Repeatedly,
- Persistently,

as we face each new challenge of the day. If this seems too much, then simply think of what happens when you forget God and leave him out of the affairs of daily life. The result must be frustration, irritation, a lack of peace, confusion, a short temper, weariness and discouragement. But when we invite God into our daily agenda, then there is peace and a sense of knowing that the sovereign Lord is guiding us and helping us along the way.

Last week Marlene and I made a quick trip to Chicago so I could speak at the funeral for my dear friend John Sergey who died at the age of 91. I will tell you what I will miss about John Sergey. I will miss his prayers. He had a voice like the voice of God, and when he prayed, he brought the whole church into the presence of God. He loved to pray-and he prayed all the time-and when he had finished praying, no one else wanted to pray. If I had to pray, I always wanted to pray before John, not after him.

One day John showed us his prayer list. Written in his own hand, the list was very long because it included his children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren, his many friends in America, and the many pastors and Christian workers he befriended and taught during his sixty-plus years as a missionary to Russia. When I looked at the list, I saw that he had written "Pastor Ray and Marlene" near the top of the list, behind only his family members. Shortly after we moved from Oak Park, John called to see how we were doing, to say that he loved us, and to assure of his continued prayers. At one point he mentioned that every night before going to bed, he prayed through his entire prayer list. "It must be a mile long," he said. Then he added these words, "When I come to your names, I feel warmed in my heart as I think of you and Marlene, and I feel as if I can meet you at the throne of grace."

We shouldn't take our blessings for granted or think that we somehow deserve them.

During the funeral service Sergei Nikolaev, pastor of the Temple of the Gospel in St. Petersburg, Russia, spoke of his influence.

I have known many great men, leaders of all varieties, great pastors and spiritual leaders from around the world. Over the years I have known hundreds of leaders, but very few of them want to pray. They all talk about prayer but very few take time to do it. John Sergey loved to pray. To him prayer was simply talking to his Heavenly Father.

Later on Pastor Nikolaev addressed the family seated in front of him.

You are John's children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren. I tell you the truth. You are what you are and where you are because of your father's prayers.

Think about that for a moment. You live for 91 years, you witness the rise and fall of empires, you build a ministry, you preach via shortwave radio for decades, you establish churches and train pastors, you work tirelessly for the church in Russia, and what do they talk about at your funeral?

Your prayers.

Not all of us can do what John Sergey did as a missionary. But we can all pray.

Lord, I want to be that sort of man. Teach me to pray and give me a heart for prayer so that when I am gone, people will remember that I prayed for them. Amen. ([1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 The Standing Orders of the Gospel](#))

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**F B Meyer** has a devotional entitled CULTIVATING CHEERFULNESS on verses 16-17...

A HAPPY AND cheerful heart is a matter of cultivation. We cannot afford to abandon ourselves entirely to our moods. There are times when we feel depressed and sad, for no special reason, except that a mood is on us! It is at such times that we need to anoint our heads, and wash our faces, that we may not be consumed by our fretfulness, or impose our depression upon others, for nothing is worse than to be a wet blanket! (Mt 6:16, 17, 18-see **notes** Mt 6:16; 17; 18)

On the other hand, there is nothing more objectionable than to be always in the presence of a comic person who thinks that every occasion must serve for frolic. After a time one gets as tired of funny stories and perpetual punning as of gloom, but while avoiding this extreme, we must not fall into the other of wearing a lugubrious expression and giving way to a moodiness of spirit, which cannot be accounted for.

We may alter our dispositions and moods by a resolute action of the will. We can refuse to look miserable, to speak mournfully, to be pessimistic, to pass on depression. In a spirit of unselfishness we can put on a cheerful courage, array ourselves in the garments of joy, anoint ourselves with the spirit of praise and thankfulness, and go forth into the world to shed sunbeams rather than shadows on the path of life. Do not nurse your sorrow of heart, lest your spirit and the spirits of others be broken.

We can promote a cheerful heart by dwelling on the bright things of our lot; by counting up the mercies which are left, rather than dwelling on what we have lost. When the heart is full of the light and love of God, can it be other than cheerful? How can this be obtained except by a living union with Jesus Christ. In Him there is an infinitude of supply of peace and joy, sunshine and light. Let us open our hearts to him, and put on these things as we array ourselves each morning in our garments (Isa. 61:3, 4, 5, 6, 7,8, 9, 10). (Our Daily Walk)

Through all the changing scenes of life,  
In trouble and in joy,  
The praises of my God shall still  
My heart and tongue employ. AMEN.

### Torrey's Topic Joy

- God gives -Ecclesiastes 2:26; Psalms 4:7
- Christ appointed to give -Isaiah 61:3
- Is a fruit of the Spirit -Galatians 5:22
- The gospel, good tidings of -Luke 2:10,11
- God's word affords -Nehemiah 8:12; Jeremiah 15:16
- The gospel to be received with -1 Thessalonians 1:6
- Promised to saints -Psalms 132:16; Isaiah 35:10; 55:12; 56:7
- Prepared for saints -Psalms 97:11
- Enjoined to saints -Psalms 32:11; Philippians 3:1
- Fulness of, in God's presence -Psalms 16:11
- Vanity of seeking, from earthly things -Ecclesiastes 2:10,11; 11:8

#### EXPERIENCED BY

- Believers -Luke 24:52; Acts 16:34
- Peace-makers -Proverbs 12:20
- The just -Proverbs 21:15

- The wise, and discreet -Proverbs 15:23
- Parents of good children -Proverbs 23:24
- Increased to the meek -Isaiah 29:19

## **OF SAINTS IS**

- In God -Psalms 89:16; 149:2; Habakkuk 3:18; Romans 5:11
- In Christ -Luke 1:47; Philippians 3:3
- In the Holy Spirit -Romans 14:17
- For election -Luke 10:20
- For salvation -Psalms 21:1; Isaiah 61:10
- For deliverance from bondage -Psalms 105:43; Jeremiah 31:10-13
- For manifestation of goodness -2 Chronicles 7:10
- For temporal blessings -Joel 2:23,24
- For supplies of grace -Isaiah 12:3
- For divine protection -Psalms 5:11; 16:8,9
- For divine support -Psalms 28:7; 63:7
- For the victory of Christ -John 16:33
- For the hope of glory -Romans 5:2
- For the success of the gospel -Acts 15:3

## **OF SAINTS SHOULD BE**

- Great -Zechariah 9:9; Acts 8:8
- Abundant -2 Corinthians 8:2
- Exceeding -Psalms 21:6; 68:3
- Animated -Psalms 32:11; Luke 6:23
- Unspeakable -1 Peter 1:8
- Full of glory -1 Peter 1:8
- Constant -2 Corinthians 6:10; Philippians 4:4
- For evermore -1 Thessalonians 5:16
- With awe -Psalms 2:11
- In hope -Romans 12:12
- In sorrow -2 Corinthians 6:10
- Under trials -James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6
- Under persecutions -Matthew 5:11,12; Luke 6:22,23; Hebrews 10:34
- Under calamities -Habakkuk 3:17,18
- Expressed in hymns -Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13
- Afflictions of saints succeeded by -Ps 30:5; 126:5; Is 35:10; Jn 16:20
- Pray for restoration of -Psalms 51:8,12; 85:6
- Promote, in the afflicted -Job 29:13

## **OF SAINTS, MADE FULL BY**

- The favour of God -Acts 2:28
- Faith in Christ -Romans 15:13
- Abiding in Christ -John 15:10,11
- The word of Christ -John 17:13
- Answers to prayer -John 16:24
- Communion of saints -2 Timothy 1:4; 1 John 1:3,4; 2 John 1:12
- Saints should afford, to their ministers -Philippians 2:2; Philemon 1:20

## **MINISTERS SHOULD**

- Esteem their people as their -Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:20
- Promote, in their people -2 Corinthians 1:24; Philippians 1:25
- Pray for, for their people -Romans 15:13

- Have, in the faith and holiness of their people -2Co 7:4; 1Th 3:9; 3Jn 1:4
- Come to their people with -Romans 15:32
- Finish their course with -Acts 20:24
- Desire to render an account with -Philippians 2:16; Hebrews 13:17
- Serve God with -Psalms 100:2
- Liberality in God's service should cause -1 Chronicles 29:9,17
- Is strengthening to saints -Nehemiah 8:10
- Saints should engage in all religious services with -Ezra 6:22; Psalms 42:4
- Saints should have, in all their undertakings -Deuteronomy 12:18
- Saints shall be presented to God with exceeding -1 Peter 4:13; Jude 1:24
- The coming of Christ will afford to saints, exceeding -1 Peter 4:13
- Shall be the final reward of saints at the judgment day -Matthew 25:21

## OF THE WICKED

- Is derived from earthly pleasures -Ecclesiastes 2:10; 11:9
- Is derived from folly Proverbs 15:21
- Is delusive -Proverbs 14:13
- Is short-lived -Job 20:5; Ecclesiastes 7:6
- Should be turned into mourning -James 4:9
- Shall be taken away -Isaiah 16:10
- **Holy-Illustrated** -Isaiah 9:3; Matthew 13:44

## Holy-Exemplified -

- Hannah -1 Samuel 2:1
- David -1 Chronicles 29:9
- Wise men -Matthew 2:10
- Mary -Luke 1:47
- Zacchaeus -Luke 19:6
- Converts -Acts 2:46; 13:52
- Peter, etc -Acts 5:41
- Samaritans -Acts 8:8
- Jailor -Acts 16:34

## Thompson Chain Reference Rejoicing

- **Duty of**-Dt12:7,16:11 Ps5:11,32:11 Zep3:14 Zec9:9 Lk10:20 Ro12:15 Php4:4 1Th 5:16
- **Instances of** 1Sa 2:1, 11:15 Mt 2:10 Luke 1:47 Acts 8:39, 16:34 Romans 5:2
- **In Tribulation, examples of**
- **Famine** -Habakkuk 3:17; 18 Matthew 5:12 Luke 6:23
- **Persecution** -Acts 5:41
- **Imprisonment** -Acts 16:23 Acts 16:25
- **Poverty** -2Corinthians 6:10 Colossians 1:24
- **Loss of Property** -Hebrews 10:34
- **Fiery Trials** -1 Peter 4:12; 4:13
- **In Evil Forbidden** -Job 31:29 Ps 35:19 Pro 17:5, 24:17 Ob 1:12 1Co 13:6

**BE JOYFUL ALWAYS**

**Rob Morgan**

Rejoice always,

Pray without ceasing,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

My sister, Ann, claims that anxious nerves and panic attacks run on our mother's side of the family; and she also claims that our maternal grandmother's genetic line has left us with a deficiency of serotonin, which makes us subject to higher than average levels of apprehension. Well, I don't know much about that—I've never studied about serotonin; but I am among the millions of people who sometimes battle anxious nerves.

But I believe God made each of us in a unique way; and I'm sometimes grateful for my own make-up because it drives me back to the Scriptures. God has placed so many verses in the Bible relating to worry and anxiety and discouragement and anger and all aspects of our attitudes, and He takes our concerns as seriously as a researcher who studies a new strain of disease. He wants to help you and me with our attitudes. He wants us to live the High Life. So I have to continually draw strength from the Word of God; and as the Lord comforts me with His Word, I've been able to pass along some of those wonderful verses to others in sermons, lessons, books, and counseling.

That's what I'd like to do during this short, summertime series of three sermons entitled The High Life, based on three of the shortest verses in the Bible. These verses are small and easy to memorize, but sometimes great truths come in small verses. A polished slab of granite may be beautiful to look; but it can't compare with the sparkling luster of a diamond. These three verses are diamonds, and the more you gaze at them the more they sparkle.

To change the figure, they are small pills or tablets, which, when dissolved slowly in the mind, can almost instantly change any attitude from bad to good, or from good to better. It doesn't matter if you're angry, sad, depressed, discouraged, anxious, or angry—these verses are mental-health transformers. They are the secrets of the sunny soul. And so today I'd like to begin a short series of three messages based on these three verses, found in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16-18 (NKJV):

Rejoice always,

Pray without ceasing,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The New International Version translates them like this:

Be joyful always,

Pray continually,

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I don't need to say a lot about the context or the background; but there is one very vital contextual observation to mention. The epistle of 1 Thessalonians represents one of our earliest Christian documents. It may have been the first of Paul's letters in terms of dates and chronology. It was written somewhere around AD 51. On his second missionary tour, Paul traveled about seventy miles from Philippi to the city of Thessalonica on the northern Greek coast. This was a great cosmopolitan city with a fine harbor that had access to major shipping lanes; and the famous Roman road, the Egnatian Way, passed through Thessalonica, giving it access to the cities and markets of Macedonia. So it was in Thessalonica that the sea lanes merged with the land routes, making this a strategic center for travel and commerce.

Well, during his second tour, Paul and Silas preached the Gospel there for a few weeks and succeeded in winning some souls and establishing a church there; but they were chased out of town when sudden opposition arose, and they had to leave their new converts rather suddenly. As Paul traveled on, he continued his ministry to these new Christians in printed form, writing two letters which we call 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In a way, this book of 1 Thessalonians is a sort of new converts manual.

There you have the important contextual matter. This passage is written to people who had already made a personal, life-changing decision to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This passage is for Christians and for Christians only. If you haven't yet met Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have no basis to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, or to give thanks in all things. You must first give him your life and your heart.

The High Life is not just a matter of a positive attitude or possibility thinking. You've got to have a spiritual foundation, and that foundation is Christ alone. So as we go through these three verses, remember that these are instructions—not for the unsaved, telling them how to be happier without Christ—but for the Christian who wants to grow happier with Christ.

Now, near the end of this book of 1 Thessalonians, beginning with chapter 5, verse 12, Paul launched into a series of marvelous little bullet points about Christian living, and in the middle of those bullet points are these three little diamond-verses on the subject of

maintaining a joyful, prayerful, thankful attitude.

Today let's look at the first verse, which says, "Be joyful always." This is the shortest verse in the New Testament as it was written in the original Greek. In our English translations, the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: "Jesus wept." So we can say in a sense, we have two "shortest verses in the Bible." In the Greek Bible, it is "Be joyful always," and in our English Bibles, it is "Jesus wept." Quite a contrast, isn't it—weeping and rejoicing? But that shows us the range of emotions that God has built into us. Well, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 might be the shortest verse in the New Testament; but it describes the highest kind of life.

Let's begin by defining joy. What is it? The Greek word Paul used here was the verb χαίρω (chairō), but in both the Greek and English, it has the same basic meaning, referring to the unique uplifting, ongoing, cheerfulness of the Christian. It is the quality of gladness that irradiates from our lives. It's the helium of the soul that makes us airborne. It's the corklike quality of our hearts that keeps us buoyant.

Yes, there are certainly moments in life in which sadness and sorrow befall us; but by-and-large, our default attitude, our baseline attitude, our normal state should be one of uplifting, outgoing joy, cheerfulness, and gladness.

I rediscovered something about that some little time ago when I was pretty down-and-out. I was coming home from a trip, and I wasn't really looking forward to getting back to my regular work. It was an overseas trip, and I was tired and weary from the journey. I wasn't sure my trip had accomplished its objectives; and I knew that there were certain pressures and problems awaiting me. The flight was long, I couldn't rest, I was bored and weary and worried.

But I pulled out my Bible and suddenly, in rapid fire order, the Lord gave me fifteen verses about joy, one after another, in quick succession. It was almost as if the Lord were saying to me, "Here! Here! Here!" I jotted down those verses, and I understood what He was telling me. He was saying, "I do not intend for you to go back to My work with a weary, worried attitude of care and drudgery. The church will suffer for it. My people will gain their enthusiasm and morale and joy from you, and what good will you be for Me if you go back with your present attitude? I want you to go back to Nashville fueled by My joy." That realization (and the power of those fifteen verses) instantly changed my attitude. A few moments before, I was worried; now I was worshipping. A few minutes before, I was dreading getting home; now I couldn't wait to plunge into the work. A few minutes before, I was weary; now I felt a new surge of energy.

I don't have time to go through all fifteen verses, but what I'd like to do this morning and evening is give you a short list of "Joy" verses in the Bible with a suggestion that you take at least one of these verse and make it your own. I'll not spend much time on any of them, but I think that at least one or two of them might have your name on them.

## PRAY CONTINUALLY

by Rob Morgan

Rejoice always,

Pray without ceasing,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

If you're looking for a good book to take with you on vacation this summer, you might go down to the bookstore and peruse the biography section, because that is arguably the most interesting section in the entire place. Biographies are the real-life stories of unusual men and women, and in many cases their entire life's story, birth-to-death, unfolds in 100 or 200 or 300 pages. But unfortunately nowadays, an unusually high number of these biographies are about celebrities, and there is very little value to those books except as we may discover in them behaviors to avoid. For example, I'm reading the biography right now of baseball slugger Barry Bonds, and I don't think I've ever read about a more self-centered and ill-tempered man.

This is why my favorite biographies are missionary stories; because these books tell the positive exploits of remarkable men and women who are living for Christ, often in hostile environments, and who do rather extraordinary things. The history of missions and of individual missionaries is a fascinating study; but sadly, there aren't very many new missionary biographies being published because the reading public would rather buy books about Barry Bonds and other so-called celebrities. So we have to dip back into some of the older books.

Well recently I found a great book written in 1921 by missionary Rosalind Goforth who served in China during very difficult days. It had an unusual title and sub-title: How I Know God Answers Prayer: The Personal Testimony of One Lifetime. The whole book was

simply a record of how God had answered prayer over and over again during the long and productive and dangerous ministry of Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth. And as I read this book, I came to appreciate the power of prayer in a fresh way.

Rosalind Goforth began the book by saying that she herself had learned the value of answered prayer early in life by listening to some of the stories told her by her family. For example:

One (story) that made a specially deep impression upon me was about our grandfather, who as a little boy went to visit cousins in the south of England, their home being situated close to a dense forest. One day the children, lured by the beautiful wild flowers, became hopelessly lost in the woods. After trying in vain to find a way out, the eldest, a young girl, called the frightened, crying ones around her and said: "When Mother died she told us to always tell Jesus if we were any trouble. Let us kneel down, and ask Him to take us home."

They knelt, and as she prayed one of the little ones opened his eyes to find a bird so close to his hand that he reached out for it. The bird hopped away, but kept so close to the child as to lead him on. Soon all were joining in the chase after the bird, which flew or hopped in front or just above, and sometimes on the ground and was almost within reach. Then suddenly it flew into the air and away. The children looked up to find themselves on the edge of the woods and in sight on home.[1]

When I read stories like that, it reminds me of how simple and practical and powerful it is when we pray; and there are a good many commands in the Bible enjoining us to do just that. One of the shortest little commands regarding prayer is found in the middle of this tiny paragraph we're studying during our three-week series of messages entitled The High Life.

Rejoice always,

Pray without ceasing,

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Now, whenever we read that verse, Pray without ceasing, we ask ourselves two questions:

Ø What does this really mean?

Ø Can I really do it?

Well, I think there are two layers or levels of meaning here.

Prayer is a Practice to Cultivate

Prayer is a practice to cultivate. To pray without ceasing means that prayer is a recurrent habit. It is something you do incessantly and frequently. Talking to God is a matter of spending definite time in prayer each day and also of talking to Him "under your breath," as it were, throughout the day. It is repetitious, continual, and perpetual. This is the same Greek word that the ancient people used of a hacking cough. It didn't really mean "constantly occurring" but "consistently re-occurring."

Now, let me show you something about this word you may not have noticed. As I said last week, it's probable that 1 Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's letters. It was written to a young church as a sort of new converts manual, after he had been driven out of the city of Thessalonica. Notice how he starts his letter in chapter 1:

Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all...

Notice that word always. I don't suppose it means that Paul sat in a corner somewhere 24-hours a day doing nothing but saying, "God, thank you for the Thessalonians. Thank you for the Thessalonians. Thank you for the Thessalonians." But he had perpetual thanksgiving for his time in the city of Thessalonica and for the gracious way in which God used him there to bring a group of people to faith in Christ. And in his regular prayers, he kept thanking God for the survival and vitality of this church in spite of persecution and hostility.

Now, let's keep reading: We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith....

Do you see that phrase: Without ceasing. It is exactly the same Greek word that we have in chapter 5. In chapter 1 he says, "I am praying without ceasing." And in chapter 5, he says, "You pray without ceasing, too."

In other words, "I very frequently stop what I'm doing and think about you and thank God for you. I hope that you very frequently pause and think and thank and pray, too."

Now, look across the page at chapter 2, verse 13: For this reason we also thank God without ceasing. That is exactly the same Greek word we have in chapter 5. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Now, look across the page at chapter 3, verse 9: For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sakes before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith.

And there we have a definition of the phrase without ceasing. It means that we pray night and day, that we pray perpetually, that we pray with great frequency and regularity, that we pray at the drop of a hat, that we pray during our regular times of prayer, but also that we go around praying, as it were, under our breath.

One day this week, I needed to find someone to do a particular job at my house that required a specialized skill, and I didn't know who to call. So I opened the Yellow Pages and saw about 30 different listings under the heading I needed. I had no idea which one to call, so I took a moment and said, "Lord, guide me to the right person." Then I worked my way through the listings and found out what I could, and then I started making phone calls. I think I found the right person; but I attribute it to the simple act of pausing long enough to whisper a prayer for guidance.

That's a habit

I want to give you an example that has convicted me about this very thing. Many of you may have heard of Dr. Michael Guido of Metter, Georgia, who is a great pioneer in radio and television work and whose little program, *Seeds from the Sower*, is one-of-a-kind.

Well, Dr. Guido is well up in years now, 92-years-old, but he's still going strong; and he has agreed to be a contributor for an annual volume for which I'm the editor. The other day I was talking with him about this little verse and this is what he said (in his inimitable style):

When I wake up in the morning, I say, "Good morning, Jesus! You and I are going to have a great day today. Just have your way with me." I slip my feet into my slippers and I pray, "Lord, bind my feet with ties of righteousness." I wash my hands and I pray, "Lord, don't let my hands touch anything your hands wouldn't touch today." I wash my forehead and I pray, "Lord, don't let me think on anything Your mind wouldn't think on." I brush my teeth and I pray, "Lord, wash my tongue. Keep me from saying anything Your tongue wouldn't say." I wash my eyes and I pray, "Lord, don't let me look at anything Your eyes wouldn't look at." As I wash my ears I pray, "Lord, don't let my ears listen to things Your ears wouldn't listen to." As I stand before the mirror to see if I'm presentable to leave the bathroom, I pray, "Lord, as that mirror reflects my image, help me today to reflect Thy image." I walk from the house to the studio and if I find a pine cone on the sidewalk, I'll pick it up and pray, "Lord, don't let anything in my life that will cause another one to stumble." I come into my study and unlock the door and I pray, "Lord, as I unlock the door of my heart, teach me Thy Word today. Help me to live Thy Word. Just live Your life all over again in me." When I look into the mirror in my study I say, "Michael you're going forth to reveal Jesus today. Let there be nothing in your life that will disgrace Him or deny Him or defame Him in any way." And then I go from room to room, wherever the staff work, and I pray for each one in his or her office, then I come back to my study and have my devotions.[2]

It's no wonder that Michael Guido has been spreading, not only the Gospel message, but optimism and enthusiasm, like seeds for the better part of a long lifetime. Now, I have a confession to make. The day after Dr. Guido told me that on the telephone, I came to my office early in the morning to have my devotions and prayer time, as I've been doing for many years. I love my morning devotion time, a practice I began as a sophomore in college, and for 35 years I've been having my morning devotions and I seldom miss a day. But I have not been starting my day as Dr. Guido suggested.

When I wake up in the morning my first thought is usually something like this: "Oh my goodness, does my back hurt! Do I ever feel stiff! Do I ever feel tired!" I stagger to the bathroom and stand under the hot shower, hoping to limber up my muscles. I grab something to wear in the closet, then lumber into the kitchen where I'll eat a bowl of cereal while watching ten minutes of commercials hoping for one minute of news. Then I drive to my office, trying not to spill my coffee on the way, and I unlock my office, sit down, open my journal, and began meeting with the Lord. But—and here's the thing—I realized after talking with Michael Guido that it's 45-minutes or so into my day before I consciously talk with the Lord. Now I'm trying to learn a new habit at mid-life, to wake up in the morning and as I roll out of bed to say, "Good morning, Jesus! You and I are going to have a great time today!"

In the Old Testament, there is a book called 1 Chronicles that opens with a long series of genealogical listings. I'd like to show you something about that list. Do you know the very first word of the book of 1 Chronicles? It's the word Adam. First Chronicles begins with a genealogical listing going all the way back to Adam: Adam, Seth, Enosh.... And several chapters later, we come down to the names of the various lineages of Israel; and in 1 Chronicles 5, we come to the descendants of the tribe of Gad. And then in the

middle of 1 Chronicles 5, we have this little passage (vv. 19ff):

They made war with the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. And they were helped against them, and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all who were with them, for they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer, because they put their trust in Him.

These men were noted in the Old Testament genealogies because they cried out to God in the battle. These men prayed in the midst of battle. They were not in their prayer closets with prolonged leisure moments of devotion. They were not in church listening to the soft music of the organ. They were in the fog of war, dodging flying arrows and flinching from the flashing and clashing of sword and shield. But somehow, in the midst of the frenzy of battle, they managed to pray, to call on the Lord—and He answered them on the spot. He does the same for us.

So praying without ceasing means that we have developed prayer habits in our lives that are continuously recurring. And that leads to the second level of meaning for this term “without ceasing.” Prayer is not only a practice to cultivate, it is a presence to enjoy.

Prayer is a Presence to Enjoy

One evening this week after supper, Katrina and I sat out on our back porch for an hour or so. We both had our books and magazines, and I was reading my material and she was reading hers. We didn't talk very much, although occasionally I'd look up and mention something from my reading, or she would do the same. It's not that we were sitting there engrossed in an incessant conversation. We weren't even acutely aware of anything in particular about the other person's presence, except that we were just there together, near each other, and it was pleasant.

Back when I was graduating from high school, there was a famous missionary who passed away at age 85. His name was Frank Laubach, and he was well-known for two things. The first was because of his lifelong campaign to spread education and literacy. In fact, he was nicknamed “The Apostle of Literacy.” The second thing about him was his personal efforts to do what Brother Lawrence had suggested centuries before, to practice the presence of God. Laubach came to a day in his life in which he determined to train himself to remember how near at hand was His God. He trained himself to consciously pause throughout each hour of the day to remind himself that the Lord was with Him. He suggested that we, too, during our little pauses throughout the day, learn to go to Christ constantly for advice on what to do next and to remind ourselves that He is standing there beside us, near at hand, present always and available to help us.

That's the way it should always be between us and the Lord. In his famous book, *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau wrote about moving into a little cabin on the shores of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. He wanted to experiment in living a life of solitude for a couple of years, and his book about it is one of the great classics in American literature. One of his chapters is called housewarming, and he wrote about the joys of having a fire in the fireplace. He said that as long as he had a fire burning in the hearth, the house never seemed empty and he never felt lonely. “I sometimes left a good fire when I went to take a walk in a winter afternoon,” he wrote, “and when I returned, three or four hours afterward, it would still be alive and glowing. My house was not empty though I was gone. It was as if I had left a cheerful housekeeper behind it. It was I and Fire that lived there.”<sup>[3]</sup>

As I read that, I thought of the Children of Israel, traveling through the wilderness with the presence of the Lord with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And in the hearth of our hearts, when the presence of the Lord is blazing within us like a fire in the fireplace, there's no need to ever feel lonely. And how wonderful to be able to enjoy that Presence and to learn to talk with Him continually!

One of the most gifted Christian writers of the 20th century was Catherine Marshall. She was the wife of a Scottish preacher named Peter Marshall, who was Chaplain of the United States Senate. After his sudden death at a relatively young age, she wrote his biography, *A Man Called Peter*, and from that moment she was one of America's best-known and best-loved writers. One of her books is called *Adventures in Prayer*, and in it she describes some of the answered prayers that have changed her life and others.

Catherine said that when she was a teenager, she longed and dreamed of going to college, but this was depression time and the West Virginia church where her father served was suffering financially. Catherine applied to Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, but even after having saved and scrimped and sacrificed, she was still short of the needed funds.

“One evening,” she said, “Mother found me lying across my bed, face-down, sobbing. She sat down beside me. ‘You and I are going to pray about this,’ she said quietly. We went into the guest room and knelt beside the old-fashioned, golden oak bed, the one that Mother and Father had bought for their first home. ‘I know it's right for you to go to college,’ Mother said. ‘I believe God planted this dream in you; let's ask Him to tell us how to bring it to reality.’”

There, side by side, the two knelt in the presence of the Lord; and even decades later, Catherine could still recall the quiet confidence and fresh determination that flowed into her as she and her mother prayed. They knew the answer would come, and

Catherine went ahead and made preparations to go to Agnes Scott. A short time later, her mother received an offer to from the Federal Government to write a history of their county, and this was enough to provide the needed funds.[4]

W. A. Criswell used to quote a poem on this subject, and he did so without attribution, so I don't know who wrote it; but it speaks to this very nicely:

When you are weary in body and soul  
Cumbered with many a care  
When work is claiming its strength-taking toll  
Make it a matter of prayer.

And when you're discouraged, distraught or dismayed  
Sinking almost in despair  
Remember there's One who will come to your aid,  
If you'll make it a matter of prayer.

And when you are lost  
In this world's tangled maze  
When life seems a hopeless affair  
Direction will come for all of your ways  
If you'll make it a matter of prayer.[5]

Maybe you have some things today that you need to begin making a matter of prayer. Maybe you've already been making some things a matter of prayer; perhaps you've been praying for a long time. Well, keep on. Jesus said in Luke 18 that we ought always to pray and not to faint. Unceasing prayer is a practice we cultivate and a presence we enjoy—and nothing on earth can compare with the peace or power of praying without ceasing.

So be joyful always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you

[1] Rosalind Goforth, *How I Know God Answers Prayer: The Personal Testimony of One Lifetime*, published in 1921. A printed copy from an online edition.

[2] Transcribed personal interview with Dr. Michael Guido, May, 2006, used with his permission.

[3] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), p. 267.

[4] Catherine Marshall, *Adventures in Prayer* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1975), pp. 29-30.

[5] <http://www.wacriswell.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/815.cfm>, accessed June 6, 2006

**1 Thessalonians 5:15 Commentary <> 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Commentary**