

## What is God's will for you in Jesus Christ?

When we ask ourselves the question, "What is God's will for you and me in Christ Jesus?" we can actually find a good answer in just three short verses of the bible in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually,

<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I have enjoyed looking at how other versions and paraphrases of the bible translate this verse from the original Greek in order to more fully develop and make clear the answer to the question, "What is God's will for me in Christ Jesus?" Let's read a few more together...

<sup>16</sup> Be joyful always, <sup>17</sup> pray at all times, <sup>18</sup> be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus. **GNB**

<sup>16</sup> Always be joyful <sup>17</sup> and never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do. **CEV**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice evermore. <sup>17</sup> Pray without ceasing. <sup>18</sup> In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. **KJV**

<sup>16</sup> Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Always keep on praying. <sup>18</sup> No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. **LB**

<sup>16-18</sup> Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. **MSG**

### Message:

I heard that the Holiday Inn hotel chain hiring policy demands the same. Recently 5000 potential employees were interviewed in order to fill 500 vacant positions in their international chain of hotels. The criteria that the Human resource managers used when they conducted the interviews was that, any applicant who did not smile at least four times during the interview was instantly scratched off the list and not considered for the job because first and foremost they were looking for cheerful or joyful people to employ. The Holiday inn's policy was to engage employees who could be joyful always no matter what happens, whether it be a tense job interview situation or dealing with challenging circumstances or guests in a hotel environment. It didn't matter what qualifications or work experience you had. It didn't matter what gender, age or race you were because what was important was whether you were deemed to be a joyful person or not.

'Well that's discrimination' you might say, especially if you're given to be nervous at interviews, a glass half empty type of person or just having a bad day or be in a particular trying season of life.

Which then begs the question, if you were one of these unsuccessful applicants for a job at the Holiday Inn because you did not smile at least four times to prove that you had an underlying joyful nature that never fails to manifest itself no matter what the circumstances- How can you then be joyful always? How do you do it or be it in such a way that the world knows that you've got joy, joy, joy, joy, down in your heart..? [Where?]

Usually it's when things are going our way that you and I are joyful. However, when things don't go your way or your own dreams are not being met or lived up to and things are less than perfect and you deem that the desires of your heart are not being fulfilled, then based on your unhappy emotions and feelings you find it very difficult indeed to be joyful because... Not only didn't you receive the gift that you really wanted for Christmas, or you got something you didn't want-1000's have been listed on trademe, or you either under cooked or burnt the Christmas dinner, or you are caught up in the holiday traffic, or someone's sick at what should be a happy time of the year. So how do you be joyful then in all such circumstances that aren't going your way or the way of those whom you know and love?

The answer I believe is to focus on the things that are working out, the blessings of God in your life the things that you today can be eternally grateful and give thanks for. Usually it is at least 90% of your life that's working out for us at any given point in time and if things are going really well it could be up to 99%. But when things are not going well, when things are bad it's usually just 10% of your life's circumstances at most. To help us with this type of thinking of faith and belief let's turn to the Bible.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church of the Thessalonians, a church that he had founded which consisted mainly of Gentiles and was located in the bustling seaport of Thessalonica, a major centre for trade and communication in the region, which at the time of Paul writing was the capital city of Macedonia, this church was thriving.

Now this church had started after what was but a brief stay by the Apostle Paul preaching and sharing the good news in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey so it was full of recent converts.

It very soon came under intense persecution and as baby Christians they had very little support after Paul left in the midst of this persecution. But something amazing was happening in this new church of recent converts, and that was it continued to both grow and thrive in spite of the opposition they faced and the persecution they suffered.

So Paul writes this letter to praise the new converts for their perseverance and, to among other things, certainly encourage them in their trials (3:3-5). So when in 5:16-18 he writes "Rejoice or Be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, no matter what happens, it is no trite thing being referred as far as a Christian in the Thessalonian Church was concerned. In saying that it was God's will for you in Christ Jesus to rejoice or be joyful always in your current affliction as Christians, Paul was sharing a deep inner truth that he himself had had to both learn and live out as a follower and Messenger of Christ. He was teaching the Thessalonian Christians here the secret that in the sorrow, persecution and shame he endured for Christ's sake- there is a new spring of joy!

It was so real, true and powerful for him in fact that it had enabled him to walk the talk of faith up to that point when he had suffered much already and further to this, it certainly enabled him to continue in the faith because ten years later while in Rome under house arrest for a period of 2 years this phrase supplied the key-note for a letter written from this imprisonment to the Philippians and that was for them to live joyfully in every circumstance. Good old Paul is still suffering but still living and proclaiming joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!" Philippians 4:4

Today Pastor Saeed Abedini refreshed by a spring of joy continues to make headlines from his Iranian prison cell. He has written a Christmas letter in which he explains his ability to withstand such suffering for Christ: "Christmas means that God came so that He would enter your hearts today and transform your lives and to replace your pain with indescribable joy." Just like the refrain of Paul's letter to the Philippians and in the same tone of the message to the Thessalonian Church.

What Paul said in these verses have been since referred to and called the **'Standing Orders of the Christian Church'**. No matter what anyone can throw at you whether it be Jewish opposition or Gentile persecution, nothing has the power to repress or suppress the joy of the church. You are not just a Jewish sect that would allow Judaism to place a stranglehold on you and even as recent converts, neither are you baby Christian's who would have the hopelessness of paganism that you left behind overtake you once again. That's not going to happen because you are free men and woman who get to experience the sheer exhilaration of joy of being free- free from fear, from guilt, from frustration and from despair. No one felt this more strongly than Paul with his rejoicing pouring often from his own lips as recorded in the NT more than any other writer, he wanted the Christians in Thessalonica to know that the roots of such **joy** lie deep within in your personal fellowship with Christ. And flowing on from the first

standing order of joy “Prayer and Thanksgiving are the two wings of the soul by which it rises upward to God” said one Bible commentator.

In praying at all times, without ceasing is more than just an encouragement for us to take all our concerns to God no matter how big or small. It points to something much bigger just like the joy, it is a matter of adopting an attitude as a Christian of having a permanently open heart and mind to receive the messages that God sends us. It is as much about listening and waiting- if not more! I believe that many saints throughout the history of the church have taught us this lesson beginning with Paul where in the face of suffering his unceasing prayer was a permanent attitude of worship, remembering God throughout the day, committing all things to him and experiencing the joy while you do it- which is something to be thankful for.

The third standing order: Giving thanks in all circumstances for everything is the fruit of the realisation that all things-good and bad, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies- work together for good to them that love God (Rom 8:28). It is not necessarily thinking of thanksgiving as an element of formal prayer, but rather from the open joyful heartfelt attitude we gratefully acknowledge that all that we have- life, health, food, our homes and possessions, comes from God. So that if we can see God’s hand in the good and pleasant things of life, which is usually at least 90% or more of our life, then with an attitude of heart and mind that is alive with a spirit of joy, we should also be able to look for and acknowledge God’s leading and presence in the midst of the challenges, misfortune, suffering and sorrow of the other 10% or less of our lives.

So, when we ask ourselves the question, “What is God’s will for me in Christ Jesus?” we can actually find a good answer in these three short verses of the bible known as the standing orders of the Christian Church issued, witnessed and attested to by the apostle Paul in

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**Closing Story:** From the nation of Haiti where Stephanie our Tear Fund child who we support as a church lives...Richard Stearns, the president of World Vision, visited a church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, nearly a year after the 2010 devastating earthquake. The church's building consisted of a tent made from white tarps and duct tape, pitched in the midst of a sprawling camp for thousands of people still homeless from the earthquake. In the front row of that church sat six amputees ranging in age from 6 to 60. They were clapping and smiling as they sang song after song and lifted their prayers to God. The worship was full of hope...[and] with thanksgiving to the Lord.

No one was singing louder or praying more fervently than Demosi Louphine, a 32-year-old unemployed single mother of two. During the earthquake, a collapsed building crushed her right arm and left leg. After four days both limbs had to be amputated, but she was leading the choir, standing on her prosthesis and lifting her one hand high in praise to God...

Following the service, Stearns met Demosi and her two daughters, ages eight and ten, who were living in a tent just five feet tall and perhaps eight feet wide. She had lost her job, her home, and two limbs, but she was deeply grateful because God spared her life on January 12th last year (2010)... "He brought me back like Lazarus, giving me the gift of life," says Demosi... [who] believes she survived the devastating quake for two reasons: to raise her girls and to serve her Lord for a few more years.

And Richard Stearns commented on this when he said: "It makes no sense to me as an 'entitled Westerner' who grouses at the smallest inconveniences -- a clogged drain or a slow wi-fi connection in my home. Yet here in this place, many people who had lost everything... expressed nothing but praise." Then he continues, "They have so much more to offer me than I to them. I feel pity and sadness for them, but it is they who might better pity me for the shallowness of my own walk with Christ."

## **Conclusion**

When our hope is in the Lord, we can rejoice no matter what life throws our way. In fact, we can GREATLY rejoice and continue to experience the sheer exhilarating spirit of heartfelt joy as we continue to pray with thanksgiving in our hearts just like these Haitian believers in any and every circumstance -- which is God's will for you and me in Jesus Christ!

## **Let's pray...**

Lord help us to accept this word, open our heart and minds to have your spirit of joy released in our lives along with the desire to daily commit our lives to you to pray and importantly to listen for you word, your encouragement, your direction and leading as we go about our business while giving thanks and praise to you for and in all circumstances being your will for each one of us in Christ Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.