



From the Pastor's Heart

November 2009

Dear Friend,

Have you ever noticed that some verses of Scripture seem easier to memorize than to put into practice? I certainly have. In fact, some of the passages that I love the most appear very difficult to live out.

A verse that immediately comes to mind, especially during the Thanksgiving season, is 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” The word “everything” is challenging because there are situations when I do not feel particularly grateful. Perhaps you have experienced similar circumstances. There are troubles we face that negatively affect every aspect of life—stealing our joy and focus away from the Savior.

There have even been times over the years when I've walked out onto the platform as the church service began and my heart was somewhere else. I was as prepared mentally and spiritually as I could be to preach the message, but emotionally I was struggling with some devastating issue.

It was through those moments that I experienced something extraordinary. As the orchestra played and the choir and congregation began to sing, my heart would respond to the words of those hymns. Giving thanks changed my focus from the difficulty I was facing to God's awesome character, provision, and love. Suddenly my troubles did not seem so overwhelming.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you discovered how powerful and freeing it is to give the Lord thanks even in the most difficult situations? When you submit to God—taking a leap of faith and praising Him even though everything seems contrary—He blesses your obedience (Heb. 11:6).

Perhaps you are facing something that seems too difficult to overcome, and you have no idea why God is allowing it. No matter what spiritual battle is before you, voice your gratitude to the Father. Because it is when you take your eyes off the problem and focus on Him that you realize He's already given you the victory. The challenge is in keeping an attitude of gratefulness and appreciation.

Throughout the years, I've found that the best way to maintain a thankful heart is to recall the truth of God's Word—specifically all the great privileges we receive when we trust Jesus as our Savior. Although our loved ones, good health, and a successful career are excellent things to thank Him for—they may let us down at one point or another. But His promises never fail and always give us reason to rejoice.

(over, please)

Therefore, the first thing we should give thanks for is Christ's gift of salvation. Through His death and resurrection, our sin-debt is paid in *full* and we are granted the privilege of an intimate relationship with the Father. No matter what trial we face, it will never be as big as the problem Jesus overcame for us on the cross. And because He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30), we know that His wonderful presence and resurrection power are always available to us (Eph. 1:18–23).

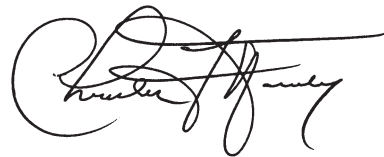
Second, we can voice our gratefulness that nothing can separate us from God's love and forgiveness (Rom. 8:31–39). Our heavenly Father cares for us unconditionally—that is His character (1 John 4:7–10). Unfortunately, the storms of life can cause us to doubt how much He loves us. They may even tempt us to respond in a manner that does not fit who we are as His children. Yet even at this very moment, God offers us His love and wants to shower you and me with His grace. In response, we should turn our hearts to Him, repent for falling short of His best, and thank Him for loving us so faithfully.

Third, the Father is worthy of our praise because He always hears and answers our prayers. We have the awesome privilege of talking to the Lord about anything that burdens our hearts—knowing that He doesn't grow tired of listening to us. And what is truly awesome about our God is that He is sovereign and knows every detail of our circumstances. He is not only able to help us overcome the issues that concern us but always understands the very best way possible to do so.

Finally, we should give thanks because we know that God has a will, plan, and purpose for our lives that He will accomplish if we obey Him. Hardships, temptations, and tests will touch each of us—no one is immune from them. But we can know for certain that the Lord allows difficulty in our lives for a reason—even when we don't understand why (Rom. 8:28). To us, trials may seem to impede our progress or undermine our dreams. But God uses them to mold, shape, and conform us into the image of His Son. Therefore, submit yourself to the Father and thank Him for His wisdom, being confident that He *will* accomplish His purposes for you.

As you face challenges in the days, weeks, and months ahead, I pray that you will remember to give the Father praise in every situation and find 1 Thessalonians 5:18 more rewarding every time you live it out. May God strengthen your heart with thankfulness and fill you with joy as you continue to seek and serve Him faithfully.

Prayerfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles F. Stanley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "S".

Charles F. Stanley

P.S. A person with a thankful heart is one who's had an experience with the Lord Jesus Christ that has absolutely transformed his or her life. My prayer is that In Touch Ministries will continue helping you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ by providing the godly resources you need to develop a life characterized with praise. I thank God for you, and the great things He is able to accomplish in your life as you walk in obedience to Him.