

"Kingdom Reality"

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Preacher: Peter

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Pray with me, if you will, as we get started. Father, we're grateful for your love and your care for us, your people.

So, greedy and thankless as we can be, you showed us love that we can't fathom or imagine in your son, Jesus.

You chase us down in time and space and put us in a place like this, even this morning, to hear your word. I pray that your Holy Spirit would be active and present among us individually and amongst us as a group to illumine our hearts and minds to the truth that you want to show us today.

Pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts will be pleasing unto you for the sake of your kingdom and in the name of King Jesus. Amen.

[1 : 09] We're going to continue our break from the book of Luke today and we'll be in the book of 1 Thessalonians. So, if you have your Bibles, you're welcome to turn there. I'll start out in chapter 1.

Paul's relationship to the Thessalonians is a really interesting and wonderful story. Paul went there and ministered to them. And as I was telling the children earlier, he came to Thessalonica, which is a metropolitan city in Macedonia.

And he showed up to the synagogue and he started preaching Jesus in the synagogue. And they let him do it for three weeks in a row. And then people got sick of hearing about this Jesus.

And they kicked him out. And it didn't stop him. Paul continued to preach about this Jesus on the streets to the Gentiles that were around. And there was great response, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

And many people turned to Jesus in ways that were miraculous and powerful and can only happen because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. As was wont to happen to Paul, a lot of people were really upset by it as well.

[2 : 18] And the Jewish people who were in some kind of power petitioned the Romans and the Greeks and a lot of the people that were around and found some rabble-rousers.

And they began to form mobs and to persecute Paul heavily, to persecute the converts heavily. And things went really bad for them and continued to be really bad for them, to the point that Paul had to leave just to try to lighten the tension on what was going on there.

And he writes a letter to them. This letter will be in today, 1 Thessalonians, which is a little different for Paul. Because Paul, if you read Romans, you know, this great diatribe theological masterpiece that you can hang everything on.

Or he writes to the Corinthians because of all of the terrible things going on in their church to guide them in back-and-forth communication on how to right the ship, how to correct things, how to do things better.

And this letter to the Thessalonians is really unique because Paul so wanted to know what was going on with him, so he sent Timothy back to him. And Timothy came to Paul with a report of a people who were remaining faithful.

[3 : 36] who had some simple questions about life and theology that Paul hadn't answered. And so this letter is actually the letter of a pastor whose heart is broken for a people that he's led to Christ.

He's in wonder and awe of what the Holy Spirit is doing, keeping them together, faithful, even in the midst of rampant idolatry and wanton sexuality and things like that that were just regular parts of everyday life in a mixed culture like this.

And Paul is grieving for these people and his heart is breaking for these people as they continue in this persecution. And he sends them a letter that's a love letter, encouraging them how to stay

faithful.

There are a couple of different parts to the letter, but we're going to focus on the very beginning and the very end today. So join me as I read 1 Thessalonians 1, beginning in verse 1, and we'll read through verse 10.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 06] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he's chosen you. Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction, you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord. For you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you, in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God for Midals to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

And for a couple chapters, he goes on about how he wants to see them, what's going on with him, what his relationship is to them. He encourages them to live lives worthy of their calling.

They had a question, because people were dying around them, and their hearts were broken, because it had almost been 20 years since Jesus died, and he was supposed to come back, and these people were dead. Are they going to be with us forever, as you promised?

[6 : 36] And he lovingly answered those questions. And then he turns at the end of chapter 5, beginning in verse 16, from a focus on themselves and a focus on human questions, to a focus on God and who he is.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

One of the hardest moments extended periods of time in my life, certainly in my marriage, began at the end of 2009, as many dominoes began to fall, and I lost my businesses that up to that point had been somewhat prospering.

And it took, I've mentioned this in many forms, I'm hopeful to give a more personal take on it this time, it took away from us a sense of stability, a sense of things that we were building toward.

I had to sell our automobiles, my bank account dwindled, and then my savings account dwindled, and then there was nothing. I wasn't able to take a paycheck for a long time, I wasn't able to have any money coming in.

[8 : 09] And most importantly, what was happening to me was the thing I had poured myself into was going away, was going away rapidly.

And my identity in that began to show itself. My identity was not steeped in anything but that at the time. As a person, I was made to feel worthless.

And as a failure, letting that many employees go, letting my family down, letting my pride issues from business partners and things like that begin to affect my life.

As a husband, I was unreliable. My wife had decided, my wife could do anything. She's probably the most incredible person I know. And she decided she wanted to stay home and have kids.

And my end of the bargain was, okay, I'll make that happen for you. And so I became unreliable. I was somebody that she couldn't count on anymore because I couldn't do what I had promised to do.

[9 : 21] I had two sons at the time, and I was absent. I was working 90, 100, 120 hours a week. You kind of have to. And it was taken away by something that a Monday morning quarterback could have seen.

But really, it was just a bigger fish swam into my pond and ate me. There's nothing I could do about it. It's business. But at the time, I didn't see it that way.

What I was doing was, I was working so hard at this business to insulate myself from suffering and from want and from the need of anything else that I couldn't supply for myself, that I was lost.

And I was in that moment. And in April of 2011, I closed my last business and liquidated the last set of items that were there. and there I was with a house to pay for, a family to raise, and really feeling completely destitute because I was so wounded and ashamed that I didn't even want to take another step forward in life.

And I didn't know how to do it. There's a sense there of true grief and true human emotion that needs to be engaged and I need to walk through.

[10:51] But there's also a sense there of an unprepared, immature Christian who encountered a hardship in life and I didn't know what to do with it.

I was so focused on myself and the things that I was doing that I'd lost focus on God, on my Heavenly Father and the things that He is doing in the world.

We ought to do what God's commanded us to do, not because of some set of rules that earns us a righteous place in His sight, but because His Son came for us and gave us His righteousness. and rose again to an eternal hope for all of us. The commands are a joy. It allows us to live as a taste in the world of His kingdom.

That's what we're seeing from the Thessalonians. They didn't know what they were doing. For a lot of these people, this is a brand new thought. And Paul comes along and encourages them in the way that they should go, how to focus on God and not focus on themselves, even in these difficult times of trial.

[12:09] And he did it in three ways there. We see them. He tells them to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks. If you see your outline, that's as simple as it gets. We're going to spend the next few minutes walking through those things.

The first thing he tells them to do is rejoice. I don't know how helpful that is to a group of people who are having their livelihoods destroyed.

Many of them have been ostracized from their families. We read of Jason in Acts 17 who actually had to pay the Romans. Him and a lot of people had to pay the Romans to continue protecting them because so many people were coming after them.

And then people are trying to kill them. And every day is a real life struggle to do anything. I don't think many of us are thinking about going to Publix or to a restaurant after church or even going home and considering, well, what am I going to stumble upon along the way?

But that's a real life encounter for these people who Paul says, hey, rejoice always. So what does rejoicing look like?

[13:18] Why do they rejoice? Because these circumstances don't offer much room for rejoicing. So I went to the Psalms and I pulled a few passages out of the Psalms to give us an idea of what true rejoicing might look like.

The first one is from Psalm 32. It's verse 11. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy all you who are upright in heart.

Why are you glad? Why are they rejoicing? Simply in the Lord. It doesn't give us a context of circumstance or what's going on. Psalm 92.4, For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work.

At the works of your hands I rejoice. Psalm 119, I encourage all of you to spend a lot of time in Psalm 119 even though it seems daunting. Psalm 119.162, I rejoice at your word like one who finds a great spoil.

Rejoicing comes from a gladness in the Lord, a knowledge of his works, his actual things happening in time and in space and at his word.

[14:35] In the New Testament, we hear Jesus talking about it in Luke 10, verse 20. One of us preached a great sermon on this. I don't remember which one of us it was. Do you not admit that he sent out some people and they came back to him and they were amazed at the power that they had over the demons and over the spirits as they were going forth in the name of Jesus.

And Jesus said, wait a second, don't rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Philippians 4.4, Paul writes, the famous one, right?

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. Grace. In Romans 5.2, through Jesus, we've obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. All of this rejoicing from the Psalms and through the New Testament has nothing to do with our circumstances.

It has nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with the perfection of God and who he is and what he's doing in the world. His constant faithfulness to us.

[15 : 44] The way he's shown us that. Rejoicing is not some cognitive ascent to something. Rejoicing is an emotion that you can't control. It's a gift.

I was about 10 or 9. We would go every year to my grandparents' house in Charleston, South Carolina. Well, Somerville, for anybody that's actually been there, for Thanksgiving. And while we were there, we would do Thanksgiving, of course.

And then we would do Christmas because we didn't see my grandparents all the time. These are my fraternal grandparents. And man, I loved my grandpa. He and I had this like super special relationship that I can't really think about any other way.

It was just amazing. He would call me. He made me like the Braves when they were terrible and watch them. He also saved all his Kellogg's box tops to get me the worst to first t-shirt when they won.

In this particular year, I went and my brother got some really cool electronic gadget from them of some sort. My sister got something really cool as well.

[16 : 53] And I got a giant pack of Calvin Klein underwear. and I turned into the most childish child I could possibly be at the time.

And I remember getting up out of the room that we were in and angry crying. You know, I wasn't like, oh, cute, the kid's really sad crying. It was like, wow, what a brat crying. And I got up and I went into the other room and I continued in my fit and my poor grandfather follows me and he was a huge man as well.

And he came in and he was like, buddy, don't you want these? Look, they're Calvin Kleens. They're really nice. And I just continued to persist in my ways there in my childishness.

About 15 years ago, it will be 15 years this coming May, I had the opportunity to sit with him for about his last week of hospice, I guess the last five days or so.

And as sad as it was to sit there with my grandfather who was this mountain of a man who'd wasted away to nothing to hold his hand to see that he needed everything done for him.

[18 : 14] It was really incredible just to be there with my grandpa and to experience that love that I have that I have for him and the relationship that we had.

He was a good man. He was a nice guy. And he worked hard. And he taught me a lot of things. And I was able to be in that space just simply rejoicing over him and his life and who he was, who God had made him to be.

And I feel like that reflects in all of our stories a little bit, certainly in mine, that more often than not I do the navel-gazing thing.

And I kick and I scream because the gift I got was a pair of underwear when the other people around me got bigger and better stuff. or because the providential hand handed me something that I wasn't wanting or expecting.

Whereas the people around me don't have any problems. And I picked out six passages but what we see from the entire corpus of scripture is that that's not what joy is.

[19 : 37] Joy is the Holy Spirit given experience of God's fatherly love for us shown in Jesus Christ.

It's an experience. And rejoicing is an expression of what that experience is. This is my definition.

This isn't a concrete definition. You're welcome to try to tear it apart at places but I feel like it's pretty solid.

And this rejoicing, this recognition of who Jesus is, it's Holy Spirit given. It's not something we can drum up in and of ourselves. We can't do it. When your mind is illumined to the reality of who God is, you can't help but rejoice in his character and begin to dwell more and more there.

And you're not expected to. It's actually a promise that that's what is going to be given to you. The only thing we can do is dwell on ourselves more and try to thwart that process.

And that's not what God would have for us. That's not what God would have for us in our lives at all. So Paul's giving us these three things, rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving as a set of building blocks to go one on top of the other.

[20 : 55] Because once you're able to rejoice, then you're able to understand prayer and what prayer should be. prayer to us and to a lot of people.

I don't know how you pray in your home. Perhaps it's over breakfast as a meal. Perhaps it is with your kids as you're tucking them in at night.

Perhaps you go to lunch with a friend. Maybe you have legit quiet times in the morning as a discipline. Prayer tends to be pretty ritualistic for us. And it was certainly no different for the

Thessalonians, especially a lot of them coming out of a pagan background, even a Jewish background.

You pray when you're supposed to pray. But it feels like this distant thing that we have to work through because we don't know how to do it. I'm certainly there.

I was listening to someone speak the other day and they said, you know, I'm not sure I know how to pray anymore. I'm not sure I have the words. I certainly understand that as well. But prayer as an activity is not really what Paul's talking about here.

[22 : 03] He's talking about prayer as a posture. Because he says pray always. Pray continually. Don't stop doing it. And he's not saying to these people, hey, whatever you're doing, just stop and you be in prayer all the time.

That's not it. There's some literary device happening here. This is hyperbole. But it's speaking to what your relationship to God is supposed to be based upon prayer. Because I think for a lot of us, we don't have a posture that's willing to pray.

And so Paul says, have a posture that is willing to pursue communication. The writer of Hebrews said this, That's not what he says.

He says, because he who is faithful has promised it. That's why. We have this access to God that we take for granted.

I take for granted. It's not intended to be a ritualistic, cold thing. It's supposed to be some kind of constant line of communication.

[23 : 32] And when we forget that Jesus actually tore the veil, we're able to go before God because Jesus is interceding for us. It should change our attitude toward prayer at all.

From a willingness to try to something more of a need to try, a need to pursue this communication. Y'all, I'm lost.

I know it. I'm amazed every single day when I consider who I am. My past, my present, the sins that confront me all around, that I am able to do anything that remotely seems encouraging to believers, certainly not to be a vocational Christian.

And I can't help but see myself in some of these verses as I consider my posture needing to pursue communication. Psalm 10 4, this is me and the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him.

All his thoughts are there is no God. Maybe I don't say that out loud, but I function that way a lot.

Psalm 58 3, the wicked are estranged from the womb. They go astray from birth speaking lies.

[24 : 46] The good Calvinist in me wants to say that. Romans 8 7, the mind that's set on the flesh is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law and it can't.

Then here's the big one and a great place to start when we consider prayer and its importance. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth isn't in us. But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and he's just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Because if we say we haven't sinned, we make him a liar and we know that his word is not in us. That's not where we want to be and that's not where Paul's encouraging us to be.

Believer, he's saying, this isn't you. Jesus has done something in you that you couldn't earn and that you can't maintain. And what God wants for you is to continue in prayer all the time and to have a dialogue with him that recognizes that and that understands that.

So we go from this willing posture, and I'm talking about sanctification as I'm saying, so we go from this willing posture, to this needing posture, and we get to this wanting posture.

[26 : 05] Jesus says this great thing in Matthew 7, a lot of great things in Matthew 7. I'm going to pick this one. 7 verse 11, if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who's in heaven give good gifts and good things to those who ask him?

That's our relationship with God. That was 2005, I was on a job site in West Ocean City, Maryland, the first time I received a text message on my phone.

At the time, I made a vow to the people who were around me that I would never again receive a text message or send a text message. I was going to get rid of whatever this thing was happening that caused people to not want to pick up the phone and call each other and not try to sit there and tap my phone.

Youth in the room, you used to have to tap every button multiple times in order to get a letter to appear and if you missed it, you had to do it all over again and you got the numbers and the symbols and everything that was associated with it.

It was a very frustrating process. It wasn't very long after that that I saw that this was going to catch on and so I showed some kind of a willingness to do it because it just made sense.

[27 : 16] Two-way radios are cumbersome. Phone calls became cumbersome. Everything that I'd ever believed in my whole life ever since the first time I turned a phone was thrown out the window for text messaging.

And I see it today a lot, especially working with youth. The beauty of your Galaxy S and your iPhone is that when you do text messaging it holds your whole conversation there, right?

So I went from this willingness to participate to seeing this need, this technological need to reach out and be connected to people, not by calling them or going to visit them, but by texting them.

There's an absolute need for it. But when I can open up my phone and see every bit of the conversation that my wife and I just had and have had over recent time, I really want to be texting my wife and I want to look back at the funny things we've said to each other, the picture that she sent me of the boys or the dogs or whatever.

Friends that are all around the country, we can have this never-ending conversation. And we keep ourselves locked into this ritualistic communication with the Heavenly Father who sent us a book about His love for us and chased us down in time and space through His works because of who He is, told us about it in His Word.

[28 : 47] And I don't want to communicate with God in that way, the way that I want to communicate with my wife. Certainly it's more than that. Every metaphor breaks at some point.

But it's at least that too. That's the wanting posture Paul's talking about, about praying constantly. It's this constant attitude of knowing where you stand with your Heavenly Father.

It's a gift to us. You're rejoicing in who He is. Pray continually. And that can bring us to the third thing there, giving thanks.

This is the most unnatural one, in my opinion. People who have lived through hard times in our country, understand that it's not easy to give thanks.

I grew up in a pretty privileged generation, I would say. People behind me are pretty privileged as well. And we live in this place now, as I said about me in the intro. My goal is to insulate myself from suffering because I think it can't touch me.

[29 : 57] And so when even a small thing happens to me, the idea of giving thanks is not the first place I rush.

Not by a long shot. And Paul's writing to these Thessalonians. These aren't unique to the Thessalonians, right? If you look at other books and letters that Paul's written, he gives these commands to everybody.

But especially to this group of people who he's thankful for and he's seen are faithful and who are living in this time of constant persecution. Imagine just being thrown out by your family and figure it out.

Your last dime's paid so that someone else can't come and kill you, but you might not be able to work because how are you going to eat? And Paul says give thanks all ways.

And as I shared there, Paul, with the kids, Paul was stoned, beaten, spent two years of his life on house arrest, finally imprisoned again in Rome and killed by Nero.

[31 : 11] And he still didn't think he was worthy of the call. He is the worst sinner of everybody according to himself. We don't know why. Maybe there were some sins that we don't know about.

But I bet it was more than rhetorical. I think that that was a real emotion that he felt. And yet he could say things like he says in Colossians 3.17, whatever you do in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

It's insanity. I'm supposed to be thankful watching my grandfather die. I'm supposed to be thankful watching friends die, people around me commit suicide, my business fail, heartache upon heartache of people around me from miscarriage to you name it.

bad diagnoses, lost jobs, giving thanks always and in all circumstances is kind of a crazy thing.

And we're usually not very helpful to each other, are we, in that time? We try to minimize what's going on. We try to minimize the process that Paul is actually walking us through, focusing on rejoicing and who God is because that'll let you pray to him about what he's doing.

[32 : 44] And ultimately, that knowledge is where we can sit in a place of gratitude and thanksgiving. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Shadowlands. I like it a lot. It stars Anthony Hopkins as C.S.

Lewis' character and basically goes through the life of the relationship between C.S. Lewis and his wife Joy. And spoiler alert, Joy dies.

That wasn't meant to be humorous. That's where it's leading and you know it from the beginning.

And after Joy's death, C.S. Lewis' character named Jack.

I don't know C.S. Lewis, I didn't, so I don't know if Jack is what people called him, but that's what I believe because the movie told me so. He brings himself out of being a recluse and finally gets back around his colleagues and he enters a cigar and brandy kind of party where people are talking and one of the people you've seen throughout the movie, a guy named Harry, walks up to him and says, well done, Jack.

Life must go on. Have you ever said that to somebody trying to comfort them and then immediately wish you hadn't opened your mouth? You know, I feel like I do that because you don't know what to say but you want to be comforting or sometimes you're really just frustrated that people are living in a place that you've not experienced or that you didn't let God work on your heart and so you've hardened yourself to that situation and they're not allowed to exist there either so I'm going to push them past that.

[34 : 26] Well, Jack responds, well I don't know if life must go on but it does and he kind of sits there broken hearted for a little while frustrated, irritated and eventually walks out of the party and there's several scenes that lead up to that but we have this expectation from each other that we take these statements in a vacuum and for some reason give thanks is the place that we rush to.

Oh, you lost a kidney? Give thanks that you have another one and they're dialysis machines. These things might be true and they might be helpful in time, it's probably not what someone needs to hear at the cusp of a diagnosis.

Because of God revealing himself to us through his spirit, because of him inviting us into communion and relationship with him, it has to alter our minds away from ourselves, away from who we are in and of ourselves and who he is and what he's doing.

And the only way to be able to give thanks in a circumstance, especially a really dark circumstance, for anything is through an acknowledgement of God, who he is and what he's doing in the world, the promises he's made to us.

He's bringing all things, reconciling them all to himself. And this ability to give thanks is the ultimate gift given by the Holy Spirit to those who have experienced God's fatherly love for us, shown in Jesus.

[36 : 25] Our Father wouldn't bring something like this or allow this to happen unknowingly or unwittingly because it's not who he is. This isn't the person with whom I have a relationship.

If there's a misunderstanding in the party, it's certainly my misunderstanding. It's not God's misunderstanding. But we don't practice that very well.

I've heard a few things recently that I thought were great. Do you ever sit down with these types of things and write down five ways that you could rejoice over God today?

Five little prayers you could have said. Five things to be thankful for. It's a 60 degree day in late November. We're going to drive out of here one way or the other on Carl T.

You're going to, well, some of you might go that way. Sorry. You're going to see beautiful blue sky and a sun and green mountain and all of this amazing stuff. And it's little, it's really little, but it's stuff that we can look at and go, man, that's amazing.

[37 : 33] Maybe it needs to be a little more simple than that. You woke up this morning. We're breathing. We're here. We have ailments. We have all sorts of stuff going on in life.

But we rush past these things we're supposed to be thankful for. And we rush to what's wrong. And that's my heart's inclination to be focused on me, not to be focused on God and what he's doing in the world.

The end of my story is I became a pastor at Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville.

Again, that was a spoiler alert. But from April through August of that year, we had no idea what we were going to do. And the pettiness of what was going on has become really evident to me over time.

We lived in a very progressive state in Maryland. I can assure you, nobody in Maryland who pursues it will go hungry. Nobody's kids will go without health care.

[38 : 41] I had great business relationships. People were offering me jobs. You know, my well-being was not at stake as far as personal care in the world goes.

And somehow God brought us through that process. I would say me, I won't speak for Emily, kicking and screaming. Because I became very content in whatever was happening next and I didn't know what was happening next.

And it didn't make sense and people would ask me and I didn't give them a great spiritual platitude like, well, I'm rejoicing in who God is and I've prayed about it thoroughly so now I give thanks for all of my situations. I didn't say things like that. I didn't know what was going on.

I was a very wounded and hurting person. And all I knew was, well, somehow this is all going to be okay. I have no idea what's going to happen. And we moved to St. Louis. That was a miraculous story again.

And we began to have these little things that we could write down where we didn't have to trust in God's faithfulness for other people. We could see it in our own lives. And he led us to a place now where we're still working on all of those things and trying to understand it.

[39 : 47] But I'm kind of headed back down into that place of, well, everything's okay now. And the danger for me is that I can live in self-sufficiency. And I can return to that place very easily.

And I heard somebody say recently that the reason you give thanks in all of the small things, it becomes easier and it becomes a habit to give thanks in all of the small things. And when you can give thanks in all of the small things, whenever a big thing hits you, you're more prepared to give thanks in that situation as well.

And I thought, man, pop psychology is fantastic. They must have read what I've been studying. And then I realized, man, that must be so hopeless because it's based on nothing. If you have that hope and your hope is not in Jesus, it's not hope.

Because all that's waiting to happen is for you to screw up again and start forgetting and then everything goes back in the toilet. What Paul's given us here, he's more Tony Robbins than Tony Robbins. He says rejoice.

Always. Pray constantly. Give thanks in all things. This is the best advice he could give to people who are going through trials and tribulations. It's the best advice he can give to privileged people in South Huntsville.

[41 : 06] Turn our minds from ourselves. And be patient and aware that God is working in the world. He promised it.

God, thank you for your love and your care shown to us. Thank you for your word.

Thank you for the ability to come together without persecution, worship you and proclaim your name. And I pray that you would equip us to see you for who you are.

Be receptive to the relationship that you activate in us and bring about in us. I pray that we would learn many different ways to give thanks to you.

That we would understand that giving thanks is indeed your will for us. Not your will because you've sovereignly said this is how you're going to give thanks, but because it's how you want us to operate.

[42 : 16] It's the way you showed the Thessalonians how to live in the world and they became a people that reeked of you. That were able to encourage the other people from around their area to know who you are.

To become renowned not because of how great they were, but because of their faithfulness to you. I pray that you would bring that about in us in a powerful way through the work of the person of your Holy Spirit, not by accident.

And again, we pray this for the sake of your kingdom and in the name of King Jesus. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Thank you.