

STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. I have been married over twenty years. My marriage is a wonderful blessing to me. It is the best thing that has happened to me. The reason it is good is because there are principles that we live by. People who have a horrible marriage don't live by those principles. If they did, their marriage would be good, too. When Lydia and I violate those principles, our marriage suffers and we go through a rough patch. In the same way, you have a wonderful relationship with God. He created you for this relationship. He wants to give you joy and peace in all circumstances. He wants to lead and guide you in your decisions. He wants to use you and give you purpose and significance. He wants to surround you with loving relationships. But for you to have a good relationship with God, there are certain principles you must live by. People who have a weak relationship with God ignore these principles. People who have a fulfilling, intimate, strong relationship with God always follow these principles. Today, we are going to explore four of those principles for a strong spiritual connection.

II. TEXT

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-28** "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 kind of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will do it. 25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us also. 26 Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."
2. We have made it to the end of 1 Thessalonians. In this last chapter, beginning with verse 11, Paul is writing about strengthening our relationships. First he talked about strengthening our relationships at church, because the church is important to God and it should be important to us; but if we're going to be the church He intended us to be, we have to treat each other right. And in verses 16-22, Paul writes about strengthening your relationship with God. Let me point out four principles, or four ways to strengthen your relationship with God.

III. FOUR WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. Develop a strong prayer life.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** "16 Rejoice always, 17 pray constantly, 18 give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
- ii. In this verse Paul gives us three commands, but they all fit under the category of prayer: Rejoice, pray, and give thanks.
- iii. When I teach on prayer, I often teach about how to have a balanced prayer life. Prayer is conversing with God, and a conversation between two people

who love each other must include more than just asking for things. That would be an unbalanced relationship. So, there's an acronym that I use in my prayer life that helps me to be more balanced. ACTS. A stands for adoration. C stands for confession. T stands for thanksgiving. And S stands for supplication. Paul is mentioning three of those prayer-elements in this passage. Praise – rejoice – tell God how good and awesome He is. Supplication – pray – tell God what you need. Thanksgiving – give thanks for all that God has done. Paul is instructing to have a strong prayer life. Let's look at each of these.

iv. "Rejoice always."

1. What does it mean to rejoice? To express great joy. Christians are to express great joy; to feel happiness or joy; to be ecstatic with joy. We are to be joyful people. Christians should not be negative, depressed, complainers, grumblers, grippers, melancholy, gloomy, glum. Sure, we can and should be sad when something bad happens. But that should not be our regular, normal demeanor. We should be joyful. We should be happy.
2. How often are to express great joy? "Always."
3. How is it possible to rejoice always? There are a couple of other verses that give us the answer.
4. **Philippians 4:4** "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"
5. "In the Lord." That's the key. We are not unreasonably joyful. We are not joyful for no reason. We are not joyful because everything in our lives is perfect. We rejoice in the Lord. Our joy is in our God. We rejoice always, regardless of our circumstances, because we have an intimate, right relationship with almighty God. We can rejoice at all times because He is in charge; He is good; He loves us; He has a plan that He is working out; He is going to use all of our bad circumstances for our good; He can do anything; He has all the answers; He has all the resources; and He promises to take care of us. Therefore we rejoice always.
6. **Romans 12:12** "Rejoice in hope."
7. "Hope." What is the Christians hope? The Christian's hope is our confident expectation of eternal paradise when we die. We can rejoice always because we know that this life short, but eternity is long. This life may be miserable and sorrowful, but the next life is going to be amazing. In this life we are weak, but in the next life we will be in the presence of Jesus for all eternity. Therefore we rejoice always.
8. **James 1:2** "2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have

its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

9. This verse says we can even rejoice when we go through hard times. Why? Because God allows us to go through trials to test our faith and grow our character. There’s a purpose behind it all. There’s a benefit for us through it all. And for that we can rejoice.
 10. So what is it to rejoice always? It is praise God all day long, and in all circumstances. It is to be mindful at all times of God’s goodness and greatness. And it results in an attitude and an inner feeling of joy.
 11. How do you develop the habit of rejoicing always? How do you get to where it becomes your normal attitude and demeanor? To rejoice always, start by rejoicing daily in your prayer time with God. Each day begin your prayer time by praising God for who He is. That will lead to rejoicing in the Lord the rest of the day.
- v. “17 Pray constantly.”
1. To pray constantly doesn’t mean every moment, because that’s impossible. It is good to have a mental attitude of prayerfulness at all times, and to try to maintain continual fellowship with God throughout the day, but that’s not the point here. It means don’t give up on prayer; pray regularly and consistently.
 2. Prayer in a general sense means talking to God. But in a more specific sense, it means bringing your requests to God (Phil 4:6). It means casting your cares upon God (1 Pt 5:7).
 3. The Bible says that God wants to take care of you, provide for you, protect you, bless you, guide you, etc. But He works through prayer. He works in response to prayer. The Bible says that if we don’t ask, then we won’t receive. We will miss out on many of God’s blessings.
 4. Start each day with a time of prayer, and bring your requests before the Lord. Pray for your own needs. Pray for your family, your church, your country, etc.
 5. And don’t give up. God usually doesn’t answer our prayers in our timing, or in exactly the way we want. But that doesn’t mean He’s not listening or working. Keep praying. It works.
- vi. “18 Give thanks in everything; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
1. Over and over the Bible emphasizes that this is to be a mark of the Christian. An attitude of gratitude. A lifestyle of thankfulness. Not just once a year in November, but every day. God wants us to give thanks, and He takes offense when we don’t.
 2. “In everything.” In all circumstances. Not for all circumstances, but in all circumstances. How is that possible? Four reasons:
 - a. In everything, God is with us. We are never alone. God is always there to comfort us, strengthen us, and guide us through.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 1:4** “He comforts us in all our affliction”

- b. We deserve worse. Because of our sin, we deserve God's wrath in hell. So, whatever we have to endure on this earth, we can always say that we deserve worse.
 - c. It could be worse. Whenever you go through a hard time, just remember that there are other people in the world who have it far worse than we can imagine.
 - d. God uses everything for our good. No matter what we go through, God will use it for our good.
 - i. **Romans 8:28** "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."
3. The way to develop an attitude of gratitude to where you are giving thanks in all circumstances is to incorporate thanksgiving in your daily prayer time.
- vii. The best thing you can do for your relationship with God is to start each day with a "Quiet Time." Set aside thirty minutes or so to get alone with your Bible, a pen, highlighter, and a notebook. Spend time reading the Bible, and then spend time in prayer. And in your prayer time, spend time praising God, making your requests, and giving thanks.

2. Be continuously filled with the Spirit.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:19** "Don't stifle the Spirit."
- ii. When you get saved, the God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. And His plan is to give you joy and peace, to grow your character, to guide you, to empower you for ministry, etc.
- iii. But just because you have the Spirit does not mean you are benefiting from the Spirit. Just because you have a car in the garage doesn't mean you are benefiting from it. You have to drive it, maintain it, obey the traffic laws, etc. Many Christians have the Spirit, but they are not benefiting from all of the Spirit's benefits.
- iv. Why? Because they are stifling the Spirit. Other translators say "quench," or "Don't put out the Spirit's fire." Eph. 4:30 says don't grieve the Holy Spirit.
- v. How so you stifle the Spirit? Sin. When you deliberately disobey God, you stifle the Spirit. It's like smothering a fire until it goes out.
- vi. With a real fire, you can actually put it completely out. But the good thing about the Holy Spirit you can never put His fire completely out. Once He comes to live inside of you, He never leaves you. You can stifle Him, but His spark will always remain.
- vii. So, what do you need to do to fan into flame the fire of the Holy Spirit? You must be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). To be filled means with the Holy Spirit is to be controlled by Him. It is to give Him complete control of your life. It is to surrender every part of your existence to Him. When you give Him control, He is able to do His work in Your life.

- viii. Each day in your morning quiet time ask the Lord to fill you with His Spirit. There is a short exercise you can do each morning. First, confess all your sins. Second, surrender. Third, ask Him to fill and empower you.

3. Take God's word seriously.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:20** "Don't despise prophecies"
- ii. What are prophecies? It is the disclosure of God's word.
- iii. At the time of this writing, God's word in the NT was still in the process of being written. So, to receive God's word the church had to rely upon certain Christians who had the spiritual gift of prophecy. These prophets would speak God's word. Paul was telling the church that when prophets spoke, take it seriously.
- iv. Today, we have the word of God in its completed form – the Bible. Can and does God still give some Christians the gift of prophecy? Some would say yes, and some would say no. Some would say that God gave the gift of prophecy to lay the foundation for Christianity, and then once the NT was completed the gift was no longer necessary and ceased. Either way, today we have the Bible, and the Bible is sufficient. It's all we need. Everything we need to know about how to know and live for God is in the Bible. And if someone claims to speak for God, their words better align with the Bible.
- v. But the lesson that Paul is making is to take God's word seriously.
- vi. Many people have Bibles but they never touch them. Or they rarely touch it. They know very little about it.
- vii. But the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God. It is inspired – every single word was given to prophets by God. And since every word is inspired, and God doesn't lie, then every word is true and without error.
- viii. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "16 All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
- ix. It is through Bible study that we grow and learn God's will. It is through Bible study that God guides and directs us. It is through Bible study that God equips us to serve Him.
- x. We need to take the Bible seriously. We need to be serious students of God's word.
- xi. Practical Ways to Get Serious About the Bible:
 - 1. Read it daily in your Quiet Time. Be sure to use a Bible reading plan (<http://churchacadiana.com/bible-reading-plans/>).
 - 2. Become an active listener to the Sunday sermon by taking notes.
 - 3. Participate in Home Group and fill out your Discussion Guide ahead of time.

4. Evaluate spiritual teaching with the Bible.

- i. **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22** "21 but test all things. Hold on to what is good. 22 Stay away from every kind of evil."

- ii. First, Paul told them to take God’s word seriously (“Don’t despise prophecies”). Next, he tells them to test all things, or to evaluate all truth claims.
- iii. In other words, don’t be a gullible Christian. Just because someone is a preacher doesn’t mean he’s speaking the truth. Just because a preacher is very popular and has a huge church and is very funny and entertaining doesn’t mean he is speaking the truth. Just because you buy a book from the Christian bookstore doesn’t mean it is the truth. Just because a book is a run-away best-seller doesn’t mean it is the truth. You need to test all things.
- iv. There is a ton of false teaching circulating today:
 - 1. Prosperity Gospel – God wants to make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous; you just have to name it and claim it.
 - 2. Critical Race Theory (wokeness) – all white people are evil oppressors; all black people are victims.
 - 3. LGBTQ – homosexual marriage on the same moral grounds as heterosexual marriage. Gender is fluid, not fixed; a spectrum, not binary.
 - 4. Socialism – the purpose of the government is to meet all your needs and solve all your problems. Give the government all control; they can be trusted.
 - 5. Permissive Parenting – don’t spank, or fuss at, or discipline your children, or you’ll scar them for life.
- v. These teachings creep their way into the church. You must test everything.
- vi. I like the story of the Berean Christians. When Paul and Silas started the church in Thessalonica, the Jews persecuted them and eventually ran them out of town. The very next town that they went to was called Berea. Notice how the Bible describes them.
- vii. **Acts 17:10-11** “10 As soon as it was night, the brothers and sisters sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. Upon arrival, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”
- viii. The Bereans “examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” The Jews in Berea already had the Old Testament. So, if anyone claimed to speak for God, they made sure that it was in line with the Old Testament. They weren’t gullible. They didn’t just take things at face value.
- ix. How do you test all things?
 - 1. Study your Bible. Read, read, read. Eventually you will know the Bible well enough to detect false teaching right away.
 - 2. When you hear a spiritual teaching, evaluate it with the Bible. Before you buy in to a teaching, an idea, a doctrine, make sure it is Biblical.
 - a. Find out the Scriptural reference.
 - b. Read it and see if you get the same thing they get.
 - c. Read it in the context of the surrounding verses.

- d. Compare it with the rest of Scripture. If they quote a verse that appears to teach baptismal regeneration, compare it to other verses on baptism and regeneration.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. In 2019 a survey was conducted to find out why people attend church. 81 percent said becoming closer to God is one of the primary reasons they attend.
2. Why do people want to get closer to God? Because people know that we were created for a relationship with God, and that the quality of your life is entirely dependent upon the quality of your relationship with God.
3. But just like a strong marriage, if you want a strong relationship with God you have to practice those principles that lead to intimacy.