GRATEFUL HEARTS, OPEN HANDS • (3)
Thankful in Every Season
1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NKJV)
Big Idea: Gratitude is a choice empowered by the Spirit.

Introduction: We are continuing our November series, *Grateful Hearts, Open Hands.* Today, we come to what may be the greatest test of gratitude: *remaining thankful when life becomes difficult.*
Here the Apostle Paul gives us three short commands: rejoice, pray, and give thanks. And these belong together because *they describe not an occasional response when everything goes our way, but an ongoing way of life with God. Let's walk through them together…*

I. The <u>command</u> to rejoice: (v. 16)

A. Joy is commanded. - *Gratitude is a choice empowered by the Spirit.* Joy is not pretending. Joy is perspective.

B. Joy is centered in Christ. — Heb. 13:8 Christian joy has an object greater than our circumstances. It is "in Christ."

C. Joy is compatible with sorrow. — 2 Cor 6:10; 1 Thess 1:6 *The Bible never tells you to deny grief.* You can say, "*Lord, I do not like this season, but I still love You."*

II. The <u>continuance</u> of prayer: (v. 17)
We commonly understand the phrase as a *lifestyle of prayer—a heart repeatedly turning toward God throughout the day.*

A. Prayer is persistent. - *"Without ceasing" means prayer is not merely an emergency procedure*.

B. Prayer is practical - *Prayer does not have to be long to be real.*

C. Prayer is personal communion. — Heb. 13:5 *Prayer reminds me I am not facing this season alone. Prayer is fellowship with the God who is already present*.

III. The <u>choice</u> of thanksgiving: (v. 18a)
Sometimes gratitude begins as a feeling. But sometimes gratitude must begin as an act of faith.

A. Thanksgiving is practiced in every circumstance. — Rom. 8:28 *Paul says, "In everything."* The text **does not** require us to call evil good or tragedy pleasant.

Charles Stanley: *Gratitude in adversity expresses trust in God even when we cannot yet see what He is doing.*

B. Thanksgiving does not deny pain. Some Christians think being spiritual means acting as though nothing hurts. - That is not biblical.

C. Thanksgiving chooses trust. - Every time you thank God in a difficult season, you are making a statement of faith.

D. Thanksgiving becomes testimony. — 1 Thess. 1:6–7 A grateful believer becomes a witness.

IV. The <u>confidence</u> of God's will: (v. 18b)

A. God's will is revealed. - Before we ask God for more directions, we should obey the directions we already have.

B. God's will is relational. — 1 Thess. 5:18b - *Joyful, prayerful, thankful living is not generic positive thinking*; it grows from belonging to "in" Christ.

C. God's will reshapes our outlook. *Gratitude changes the way we see the season we are in.*

V. The <u>capacity</u> of the Spirit: (1 Thess 1:6)

A. The Spirit supplies joy. — Galatians 5:22 *Fruit grows from life within.*

B. The Spirit sustains prayer. — Rom. 8:26 *The Spirit helps in our weakness.*

C. The Spirit strengthens thanksgiving. *Gratitude is a choice empowered by the Spirit.*

D. The Spirit turns gratitude outward. — 1 Thess. 5:14 Gratitude is not merely something we feel. It shapes how we treat people.

Conclusion: The Season Changes, but the Savior Does Not
Series connection: Psalm 103 — Remember His benefits. • 2 Cor 9 — Grateful hearts *become open hands. • 1 Thess. 5 — Grateful hearts endure every season. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* — 1 Thess. 5:16–18 (NKJV)