

IN EVERYTHING

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ... "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Most of us do not appreciate it when people tell us "it will be okay," in the midst of a terrible ordeal. What we want is to hear someone tell us they have been where we are, they have experienced what we are experiencing, and they understand the pain and misery our situation has brought to us. In many instances, the severe problems we face in life, such as the loss of a loving spouse, child or parent; or, a crippling illness or injury, job loss, or financial catastrophe, do not have quick and easy fixes. They are not washed away with a smile and a hug. We know that the pain and suffering from many severe problems will last for a while, which means that the simple platitudes of a friend, though meant well, are unrealistic and, perhaps, dishonest.

I learned as a father, never to lie to my child about what she might expect when facing an injection, or the insertion of an IV needle, or a blood test. When she was learning to ride a bicycle, I told her that she would probably crash a few times and that it might hurt a little. When going to a dentist, I told her what to expect. I told her the truth, while removing the fright she might feel. That built trust between us. And, in most of these instances, she found the experience less traumatic because I was honest. I have seen friendships dissolve between two people when one lied to the other about a trial being experienced. What good is a friend who lies to you when the going gets difficult?

One of the most frequent sayings that Christians tell other Christians during a trial, is: "Give thanks for everything." Not only is this ridiculous, but it is a misquote of scripture. Our verse today says "IN everything give thanks." The words "for" and "in" have completely different meanings. God does not expect you to thank him FOR your illness, injury, exam failure, car crash, empty bank account, or leaking roof. He does expect you to be thankful and grateful to him for being trustworthy and faithful to you IN those moments of pain and suffering. Thankfulness, even in the midst of a storm, is often the door through which God can comfort you and provide for your loss. But you can lock that door closed by becoming angry, or impatient and complaining to God. Anger, impatience, and complaints usually make your situation worse, because they create emotions that interfere with your connection to God.

The rest of today's verse is the punchline to this lesson: give thanks because that is God's will. Not only does thankfulness often open the door to comfort and solutions to your situation, but your obedience (by doing God's will) can be rewarded. If you are experiencing something today that seems out of your control and without relief, try thanking God for his faithfulness in the other areas of your life. If you know someone who needs that advice, be truthful and do not misquote scripture to them.

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