

## Marked by the Spirit

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This is our second to last sermon in 1 Thessalonians. We're taking this passage out of order, but will pick up vs. 12-15 and the final verses next week. We've been looking at how the Spirit works through the gospel to produce a church of faith, hope, and holy love. This passage shows how to sustain all that: *Marks of faith, Heeding the Spirit, and He Will Do It.*

### Marks of Faith

In the first few verses we see three marks of faith and why we should embrace them: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (16–18). Think about the people you enjoy being around. Why are you drawn to them? **Joy.** People who seem to be alive, to “rejoice always,” draw us in. But this joy isn't always what it seems. I know of two life of the party people, the kind of people we're drawn to, *who committed suicide this year.* We can mistake gregariousness for joy, extraversion for gladness. Blaise Pascal famously said, “All men seek happiness, even those who hang themselves.” Joy is serious business. And this is why Paul tells us, Rejoice always. He had a certain joy in mind. Not an Enneagram #, not a standard of living, a joy not contingent on life circumstances. It's the joy Jesus' brother had in mind when he said, “*consider it joy when you encounter all kinds of trials*” (Js 1:2). That's deep joy. All kinds? It may strike you as unnatural, because *it is.* It is out-of-this-world joy, *not* this-worldly happiness. Unnatural joy is for unnatural people, for people born of the kingdom of God. When a person chooses to trust Jesus, they enter his kingdom. And for a time, they straddle the world that is and the world to come, one foot in the city and one foot in the kingdom. Which makes you unnatural, weird, but it also gives you an unusual advantage. It puts you next to unending joy: “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (squeezing happiness out of world) but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Ro 14:17). People with a foot in the kingdom experience uncanny joy and peace. Why don't I experience that joy more? Because your foot slips from the kingdom. We get to living in the here and now and not “in the Holy Spirit” and we start to expect things of this world to give us the joy that's out of this world. You ever get a new outfit, see a new movie, read a new book—and when you're done with it, immediately want another? It's not enough. That's your heart telling you, your looking on earth for what can only be found in heaven. See, joy is a choice. That's why he exhorts us, Rejoice always! How do you do that? Get your foot back in the kingdom. Or get the kingdom in you. How? The kingdom of God is *joy in the Holy Spirit.* A kingdom of joy enters us in the Spirit. We see it in Thessalonians, “*you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit*” (1:6). Unnatural, uncanny joy *in affliction.* There it is—deep joy! Is the kingdom in you? Do you have a foot in the kingdom? Or has your foot slipped? If it has, you won't experience the joy of the Spirit. The second mark of true faith is **gratitude.** He says *give thanks in all circumstances.* In a case study, one set of people were asked to write down all the things they were grateful for at the end of the day. Another set were to write down their complaints. After some time, the grateful people showed a considerable improvement in health, contentment at work, and overall optimism. The people focused on complaints reported increase in discontentment, overeating, and depression. Conclusion? Complaining is bad for your health; gratitude is great for it. A lot of us live as though we're in group 1, as though nothing to be grateful for.

Around the dinner table, my wife frequently asks us, “What’s one thing you’re grateful for today?” One by one, we list things off *that would have otherwise gone unnoticed*. Piles of gratitude left behind. Always lifts spirits. But the reason we should do this is not so we’ll be healthier or more content. Paul says give thanks...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. We do it because it’s *the will of God*. It is the desire of the supreme Being of the universe. A good thing to be dialed into! It’s the will of God in Christ Jesus, and here things start to align remarkably. God wills gratitude, and joy in the Spirit, for those who are in Christ Jesus. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are around the table, piling good stuff on your plate. But if we let our foot slip, if we get up from the table, choose to live outside of Jesus, we’ll be gobbled up with ingratitude, joylessness—and that can be deadly. We’ll be out of step with the supreme Being of the universe. And this creates distance between us and God. We talk to him less. We certainly won’t, third mark, **pray** without ceasing. You see, all three marks of faith—rejoicing, showing gratitude, and praying are interconnected. Grateful people are more joyful people, and both joy and gratitude come from staying put in the kingdom, being close to the King. The more I talk with my wife, the more joy and gratitude I feel for her. When I’m out of touch with her, it’s tempting to harp on her shortcomings. See, the more we talk and live and breathe in the kingdom of God, the more we experience unnatural joy and gratitude. You have a choice: rejoice always, pray unceasingly, give thanks OR keep demanding of earth what only heaven can provide.

### Heeding the Spirit

We could take everything so far, individualistically. I need more intimacy with God to be marked by joy and gratitude—and that’s true; it starts with the you and me—but all along this has been for “the brothers and sisters.” The family of God. Remember, expressing gratitude lifted the whole family’s spirits. Heeding the Spirit, not quenching his voice, is not just for you but *for others*: Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil (19-22). The word quench means “to put out, extinguish.” Like a flame doused with water, tsss. We can put out the flame of the Spirit. We can respond to his prophetic ministry in a way that douses his message, drowns out his voice. What’s his prophetic ministry? Happens in two primary ways: the **preached** Word and spontaneous prompts. Peter describes Scripture as “the prophetic word which you do well to pay attention to as a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Pet 1:19). How do we quench the Spirit in our response to preaching? This can happen several ways. You’re listening to the message, sense the Spirit’s conviction, and come Monday you’ve shrugged it off. Or in CG the leader asks a question based on the sermon. Someone responds with their thoughts, then another, and before you know it we’ve veered away *from the Word to focus on our opinions*. We focus on how the sermon made us *feel*, or what it made us *remember*, and spin away from *what the Word is actually saying*. You’re responsible, to God and your community, to drag the conversation back to the Word, to get around the table of the kingdom and ask, “Where do you get that from? How does that compare to what Paul is saying?” We quench the Spirit when we elevate our flawed opinions over his flawless Word. Say someone is complaining and saying it’s just so hard to rejoice in all circumstances. Instead of challenging their thinking, you nod your head and say it’s hard. That’s fine but if we don’t challenge them with what the Spirit says, then we a) leave people in their struggle and b) drown out the voice of the Spirit. You see, the gathering of the church is a profound opportunity to hear from the Spirit, to allow him to

“guide us into the truth,” but if we’re not keeping a foot in the kingdom, we won’t speak up. *We’ll quench the Spirit.* Other way the Spirit speaks is through prophecy—speaking when the Spirit brings something spontaneous to mind. **Prompts.** Like in Acts 5 when Peter suddenly knew that Ananias was lying to him, or in John 4 when Jesus has on-the-spot insight into the Samaritan woman’s marital history. Now, the challenge with these spontaneous words is that *they are open to error* and can *not* be of the Spirit. That’s why Paul says test everything. Hold to what is good, abstain from what is evil. It’s also why we shouldn’t attribute a spontaneous word to God. It’s to be tested. Instead, just share the prompt, let the community test it to see if it was from the Spirit. How would heeding the Spirit change the way you approach your CG discussions, your FC reflections, you’re interactions with other Spirit-indwelt Christians? We would approach the gatherings with expectation, eagerness to hear from an authority greater than the sum total of the people in the room. We would come expecting to hear from God, and leave seeking to do his will: rejoicing, giving thanks, praying not quenching the Spirit. Martin Luther asked what would you do if you heard God was going to be speaking in town, at such and such location? What would you do? You’d be there, early, eager, heart ready. God speaks, every time the Word is preached, opened, read! *Heed the Spirit!*

### **He Will Do It**

Finally, all of this instruction comes from the God of peace, who wants peace to fill our lives *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (23-24). Sanctification is getting close to God. Sometimes painful but always peaceful, restorative. When we’ve got two feet stuck in this world, it can be difficult pulling one out. But when we do, we step into unnatural joy, gratitude, *peace*. But you’ve gotta make the choice. And here’s the remarkable thing about being in Christ. He will surely do it. He who calls you is faithful. You choose to do it, but God does it. When I do a climbing wall, they hook me up to an automatic belay. And with each lurch forward, to a new hold, the belay tightens and a strength outside me simultaneously lifts me up, moving me forward. When we choose joy, gratitude, prayer, the Spirit, a strength outside us pulls us up, draws us in, sanctifies us, until one day walking with God is effortless. May he find us reaching for the marks of faith, heeding the Spirit, for one another, until he returns. He is faithful; he will do it!