

# JOY:FULLY LUTHERAN

## 1 THESS 5:16-24

**T**HIS BIBLE STUDY INTRODUCES THE THEME VERSES for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s triennial theme, “Joy:fully Lutheran”. This study of 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 highlights Paul’s teaching that the Christian’s response to God’s love in Christ is to rejoice, pray and give thanks (1THESS. 5:16–18). God’s promise is certain and sure in Christ, and God will sanctify us wholly and keep us blameless at the coming the Lord Jesus Christ. Our response to His love and mercy is joy.

### PRAYER:

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners, You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

### Read 1 Thess. 5:16–24.

#### To whom is this passage written?

This passage exists at the end of a letter to the Church. These verses are written to Christians. The first seven verses are law. They teach the Church how to live out her faith. They will, of course, convict Christians that we are not living according to God’s will for us. At the same time, this passage instructs us about God’s will for our lives in Christ. As baptized believers, we rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, etc.

None of these commands are possible outside of Christ. The Holy Spirit enables believers to trust in Jesus and to live in Christ.

### Read 1 Thess. 5:16–18.

#### What leads Christians to joy?

Christians rejoice because of God’s love for us in Christ Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the reason for Christian joy. We rejoice that God’s promises are always “yes” for us in Christ Jesus (2 COR. 1:20). Trusting that God’s will is always for our good and that He delights in blessing His people, we rejoice in His love enacted and freely given. His love for us sinners in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection defines life for us. Baptized into Christ, we live in Him and hope in Him for all things at all times.

#### Why do we pray?

We pray because God has invited us to request of Him as children request of their dear human father. Prayer flows from trust in God as provider and defender. Prayer teaches us of our total dependence on God for all good things. And prayer is always in the name of Jesus, which means more than merely saying “in Jesus’ name” at the end of our prayers. Praying in Jesus’ name means we approach God because of His love for us. We trust that Jesus is our advocate before the Father (1 TIM. 2:5–6). The one who died and rose for us is also interceding for us with His Spirit (ROM. 8:26–39). God rejoices to hear from His children, and so we live in constant prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **For what do we give thanks?**

Our response to God's grace is to give thanks. God loves and forgives. We give thanks. This is the rhythm of our worship and our life. God's love and grace in Christ Jesus define who we are. Our response to His love is to give thanks, to praise Him for His goodness.

In all circumstances we give thanks. In every situation and in every need, we thank God for His love and His promises. We give thanks even when we suffer in this life. James reminds us to rejoice in trials (JAMES 1:2-4).

### **How is the Christian life (sanctification) one of response?**

These verses may sound like a lot of commands. And they are. This is how we live in response to God's love and action in Jesus. We rejoice, pray, give thanks and do other things not to earn God's love or favor, but in response to God's grace and mercy in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Does our rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving mean we will never suffer or face trials?**

The commands to rejoice, pray and give thanks sometimes make it sound like we are supposed to live lives that are always good and positive, that the Christian life is always "blessed" in such a way that we don't suffer or that all things always go well. But we all know that isn't reality. Those who are in Christ suffer just as all others do. Christians are not guaranteed a life without trouble, and we are not called to pretend our lives are now easy or perfect because we belong to Jesus.

### **Read 1 Thess. 5:19-22.**

#### **How do we quench the Spirit?**

The Spirit comes to us in the Word. When we remove ourselves from the preaching of His Word, we quench the Spirit. In his explanation to the Third Commandment, Luther teaches us to not despise preaching and God's Word, but to hold them sacred and gladly hear and learn. We also quench the Spirit when we read the Word, but do not believe it to be the Word of God, or do not obey its commands. The most egregious way we quench the Spirit is to not trust in Christ for salvation.

#### **How do we despise prophecies?**

We despise prophecies when we do not believe the Word of God or trust in it. When we seek truth outside of the Holy Scriptures or choose to follow teachings that conflict with the Bible, we despise the teaching of Christ in His Word.

#### **How do we test everything?**

Sola Scriptura — by the Scriptures alone. God has delivered His Word to us. The Holy Scriptures are the only trustworthy source for all doctrine and practice. We do not trust our feelings or even our reason, unless they are in line with Scriptures. The inspired, inerrant Word of God points us to the cross, creates faith and strengthens our faith by the power of the Spirit. We measure all things by the Word.

#### **Why are we to avoid evil?**

Grace does not give us freedom to sin, but freedom from sin. We have been transformed from death to life through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have been crucified to our sin and raised to life with Jesus. Sin is no longer our master. We are set free to love — love God and love our neighbor.

### **Read 1 Thess. 5:23-24.**

#### **What does the word sanctify mean?**

Sanctify means to "make holy." This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. God makes us holy by uniting us to the holy life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Son of God. Notice that all the holiness is God's and not ours. Only by His grace does He freely give us holiness through the forgiveness of our sins. Holiness is not something we earn or achieve through our works, but something that is given to us in our Baptism, through the Lord's Supper and in Holy Absolution.

### **How much of you does God save?**

God saves all of you — body, soul and spirit. This threefold description of the entire person is unique in the New Testament. Usually the Apostles describe people as body and soul. The addition of spirit here is curious, and seems to show that Paul wants to make sure the Thessalonians know that God saves their whole being — not just their soul, not just their body and not just their spirit. God saves every bit of them. God saves every bit of you. The resurrection is not just a spiritual idea. It is holistic. In the same way, forgiveness is pervasive. Christianity can never be reduced to a “spirituality.” God saves your entire being — body, soul and spirit.

### **Are you blameless?**

In Christ, yes. In yourself, no. This is the daily reality of the believer. Our sin condemns us as guilty before God and our neighbor. Our sin deserves punishment and death. Our sin declares us impure and unclean. But Christ forgives your sin. He removes it as far from you as the east is from the west. Jesus takes away your sin and gives to you His righteousness. When God looks at you, He sees you in Christ, forgiven and blameless. Your Baptism marks you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified — bought back from sin and death to forgiveness and life.

Your life testifies that you are sinful. God says you are forgiven. God’s Word endures forever. It is in God’s mercy and forgiveness that we trust.

### **Who is responsible for this work in you?**

The Good News is that God is entirely responsible for your salvation. He doesn’t need your help. Which is good, because you cannot do anything to earn salvation. God alone works to save. God the Father sent His Son to be the sacrifice for sins. Jesus lived, died and rose again to save you. The Holy Spirit works faith through the Word and Sacraments.

### **How do we know that He has done this work in us and will do this work in us?**

The cross of Jesus means God keeps His promises. We trust in God’s Word of promise that He has loved us and He will continue to love us. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the accomplishment of that love.

### **Why do we rejoice, pray and give thanks?**

We rejoice, pray and give thanks because of what God has done for us in Christ. The Gospel is Good News — God loves you, forgives you and grants you eternal life. Freely. This results in joy. This eternal, almighty God invites us to speak to Him as dear children to their loving Father. We pray, trusting in His love and mercy, looking to Him for all things. And we give thanks. He has done all things well. He loves us. He provides for us. He is with us. For all this, it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.