

# “Give Thanks in All Circumstances”: The Secret to Gritty Gratitude (Part 1)

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With my sermons, I don't often follow along with the holiday seasons and all this, but this time because I'm in between things—I just finished Habakkuk, and we'll be looking to get Acts going in the new year—I thought it might be good to do so. So with Thanksgiving coming up on Thursday, I thought for this Sunday and next, it might be interesting to focus in on the subject of Christian gratitude. And then, as we move into December, I'll take up some of the themes of Advent and reflect on those together.

## Introduction

### The Text

“[G]ive thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:18)

### God's Will for Your Life

A. I wonder: have you ever struggled trying to figure out God's will for your life?

1. As a pastor I hear of this sort of thing all the time. “I want to know what God wills for me. I'm seeking him for it, but I'm still not totally sure.”
  - a. And, of course, usually we're thinking of something like: “Do you want me to take this job or that job?” “Should we move to this city or that city?” “Should I buy this house or that house?” “Should I date this girl or that girl?” And so forth.
  - b. And we think: “Oh God, if you would just reveal to me your will, I would gladly do it!”

B. Well, I've got good news for you: Here in our text, it's as if he's leaning in through the Apostle Paul and telling us what his will is for us. And here's what he says: “[G]ive thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1. You say: “Thanks for that pastor, but that's not exactly what I meant.”
2. I know. But nevertheless, this is God's will for us. That we “give thanks in all circumstances . . .”

- a. I don't know what job you should take. I don't know who you're supposed to date. But I do know this: God wants you to be thankful . . . in everything, wherever you are, whatever you're facing.

- i. Are you as ready to move on this, as you were with regard to the other things?

C. Now, of course, I'm not meaning to imply that God can't also guide and direct us in those other matters we're concerned with. He wants to help us as we lean on him for wisdom regarding our

vocation and big moves and our significant purchases and our important relationships and things like this.

1. But as we clamor on and get all anxious wondering about what his will might be for us in a more personal and particular way, we must not, we cannot, neglect that revealed will of his which applies to all Christians and has been written down and preserved for us in Holy Scripture.
  - a. In our pursuit of this more personal guidance, we cannot set aside that which he has already called us to.
    - i. I can certainly imagine a situation where, in our concern for which way God would lead us, we actually start to grow grumpy and discontent with him: “Why won’t you tell me? What is your problem?”
    - ii. And, hence, ironically, while pursuing his will for us we contradict it. For we can know without a doubt he calls us to give thanks in all circumstances and yet here we are thankless and irritable.
- D. So, you’re welcome, for those of you who’ve come in this morning desperate to know God’s will for your life—call me a prophet, call me a pastor, call me whatever you wish . . . I know what it is: thanksgiving.
  1. And, of course, I’m not talking about a mere day on a calendar, or a big meal on your plate. I’m talking about something in the heart: a deep satisfaction in God that gives rise to expressions of praise and gratitude to him.
- E. So let’s consider this verse in more detail. We’ll break it down bit by bit and identify (1) The What; (2) The When; and (3) The How of it all.

## (1) The What

### A Significant Theme

- A. As has already been made clear, The What Paul calls us to here is that we “give thanks . . .” But I wanted to explore this idea just a little bit more with you . . .
- B. You see, gratitude or thanksgiving is a massively significant theme in the Scriptures. It seems to matter much to God that we be a grateful people.
  1. In the OT, this is especially evident in the Psalms, right?
    - a. Ps. 30:11-12: “<sup>11</sup>You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, <sup>12</sup>that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!”
    - b. Ps. 95:1-2: “<sup>1</sup>Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! <sup>2</sup>Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!”

- c. Ps. 107:1-2: “<sup>1</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD say so . . . .”
2. And then, in the NT it’s a note struck time and again by Paul in his letters to the various churches:
- a. Eph. 5:4: “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.”
  - b. Col. 2:6-7: “<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”
  - c. Col. 3:15: “ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”
3. And, of course, it’s not just the redeemed of the Lord that are to “say so” here. In Scripture, we’re told that all of creation is participating in one way or another in praising and thanking God.
- a. So Jesus tells the Pharisees, if you were to silence his disciples from praising him, “the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40).
  - b. And Isaiah speaks of “the mountains and the hills . . . break[ing] forth into singing, and all the trees of the field . . . clap[ping] their hands” (Isa. 55:12).
  - c. In Rev. 5:12, John gives us a vision of all the angels around the throne in heaven worshipping God and “<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’” (And in Rev. 7:12 they add to that list “thanksgiving”!) But John goes on to expand on this worship service to include the whole cosmos: “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’” (Rev. 5:13).

## The One Anomaly

- A. What we realize, then, is that, with our redemption in Jesus, God is just trying to get us caught back up to where we should have been alongside the rest of creation all along.
- 1. What I mean is: when God saves and redeems us and then calls us into a lifestyle of thanksgiving, he’s just bringing us back into alignment with the rest of the universe that is already living that out.
- B. Human beings, sadly, in our sin, we’re the only anomaly. We’re the only rogue creatures, unwilling on principle, to give God thanks.
- 1. So Paul in Rom. 1:21 writes: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” “Oh we know he deserves our honor and thanks, but don’t want to give it. So it all goes dark.

- C. But, with Jesus, it's as if God is braving the cobwebs and the dank darkness, and he's stepping down into the dusty basement of our hearts, as it were. And he finds that little chain link hanging down from the bulb there, somewhere near the center of the room. And he pulls it.
1. And, suddenly, light comes flooding in! The darkness recedes. The dust settles. The roaches scatter. And, for the first time in our lives, we not only see God, but now we give him thanks!

## Are You Famous?

- A. The idea here, I think, is that Christians should be famous for their glad-hearted gratitude. In view of God's redemption, we should be known by all for our spirited thanksgiving.
- B. So then the question that presses in upon us at this point, of course, is: so are you?
1. Are you famous for your glad-hearted gratitude? Are you known for your spirited thanksgiving? Or are you known more for your grumbling and discontent? Life's never quite what you want it to be; people are never quite who you want them to be; and so forth.
  2. Are you known for your thanksgiving or for your complaining; for your overflowing satisfaction or for your never-ending list of grievances?
  3. Do you walk into the room and bring people's attention to the good and the grace of God at play, or do you accent only all that's wrong and what could be better?
  4. Are you in alignment with the rest of the universe in its giving of thanks to God, or are you still, as one author has put it, "out of sync" with it all?
- C. You want to talk about what God's will is for your life? Christians should be famous for their glad-hearted gratitude. That's what he wants to see.
1. So are you? Am I?

## (2) The When

### It Only Gets Wilder

- A. And now if that sounds in itself a bit overwhelming, a bit crazy even, it only gets wilder as we keep on here with Paul's words and come to consider The When of all this. When are we to give thanks? Well, here's what he says: "[G]ive thanks in all circumstances . . ."
1. It makes you want to clear your ears out in disbelief and ask for another reading, doesn't it? "Could you repeat that please? Surely I didn't hear that right. In 'all' circumstances?!"
  2. It makes you want to go back to the original language and wrestle with the Greek words Paul actually wrote. And I'll tell you what: I did. And, you wouldn't believe it, but "all" means "all"—*en panti* = "in all things"; "in everything"; "in all circumstances."
    - a. Now, to be clear, the word "circumstances" technically isn't there in the Greek, but something like this is the clear implication. We're not in any way let off the hook.

- i. The idea is: in everything, all the time, wherever you are—when the sun is shining and the birds are singing, and when the fog just won't lift; when there's a smile on your face and a skip in your step, and when you can't even hardly bring yourself to get out of bed because your heart is so crushed—in it all . . . give thanks!

B. And, again, this just sounds too much, right?

1. I mean, it's hard enough to be thankful when things are going good for us. Even when stuff is going relatively well on the whole, we're still drawn to focus on those one or two things that aren't quite right, aren't we? So I struggle to give thanks even in good circumstances.
2. Now you're saying I can and should still be thankful even when it feels like my life is caving in?! I don't get it. This sounds crazy.

- a. This doesn't sound in sync with the universe and reality, or whatever. This sounds out of sync, and out of touch, right?

C. Our last ditch effort to hollow out the clear freight of Paul's words here would be to say: maybe he didn't really mean this. Maybe he's just having an off day, he didn't hear the Spirit quite right. Maybe this is just a one-off statement that he might wish he could take back. But, certainly, we won't find him saying something this extreme anywhere else, right?

1. Well, that's a valiant effort, but, when we look at his other letters, we come to find: he says the same sort of thing time and again. Far from this being an anomaly, this discussion of ever-present gratitude in a Christian's life seems to be somewhat central to his ethical instruction.

- a. So to the church in Ephesus he writes: “<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> . . . be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (Eph. 5:15–20).

- i. Did you catch the logic? Because your time is limited, because the days are evil, don't you dare waste a precious moment complaining or grumbling. Our God is on the move for good. There's so much to be thankful for . . . always . . . in everything!

- b. He says something very similar to the church in Colossae: “<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:16–17).

- i. Whatever you do, in word or deed, let it be shot through, saturated to the core, with thanksgiving. Wow!
  - 2. And, of course, Paul doesn't merely call us to this sort of thing, he also modeled it himself—even in this very letter to the Thessalonians.
    - a. So he opens in [1 Thess. 1:2-3](#): “<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,<sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
    - b. And later in [1 Thess. 2:13](#), he writes: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”
      - i. “I’m always praying for you. I’m always thanking God for you.”
- D. So back in [1 Thess. 5:18](#) then, this is not Paul somewhere out in left field, like he’s veered from his lane or something. This Paul running full speed down the straight and narrow.
  - 1. This is the call on every Christian everywhere in everything: give thanks.

## Even in the Hard Stuff?

- A. And, of course, the most challenging part about this idea is giving thanks even in the hard stuff of life, right?
  - 1. We maybe could pull off being more thankful in the good times . . .
  - 2. . . . but even in the heartbreak, and the suffering, and the pain? I don’t know.
- B. And, what we have to see, is that Paul’s command to the Thessalonians here comes to them while they are facing, it would seem, a time of tremendous suffering.
  - 1. We know, from the record in [Acts 17](#), that when Paul first tried to set up shop in Thessalonica during his second missionary journey, it went south quickly. And he was run out of town, and great persecution arose there for any who were buying into what he was saying.
    - a. The new Christians were being accused of sedition against Caesar, because they were going on talking about King Jesus, and that was a threat. So they were persecuted in extreme measure.
  - 2. And Paul’s concerned about them in this, and he references it many times in his letter:
    - a. So he writes in [1 Thess. 1:6](#): “[Y]ou became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit . . . .”

- b. Or, similarly, later in [1 Thess. 2:14-15](#) he says: “<sup>14</sup> [Y]ou, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,<sup>15</sup> who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind.” “You’re in good company. Just as Jesus was persecuted so too all his followers will be as well” (cf. [John 15:18-20a](#)).
  - c. Which is why he goes on to write in [1 Thess. 3:3b-4](#): “<sup>3</sup> [Y]ou yourselves know that we are destined for this.<sup>4</sup> For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.”
  - d. And then, finally, in [1 Thess. 4:13](#), he references their grieving over those who have died—which many take as a likely reference to those who’ve been killed, martyred for their faith.
- C. So it takes an awful lot of courage and boldness and spiritual conviction to write to a people facing such dreadful circumstances what he does here in [5:18](#): “[G]ive thanks in all circumstances . . . .”
- 1. If you’ll forgive me, don’t you almost just want to slap Paul across the face at this point? How insensitive! How unfeeling! How heartless! How out of touch!
    - a. Who would dare tell the wife who just lost her husband to some terrible act of organized persecution: “Cheer up, rejoice, give thanks, isn’t God good!”?!
    - b. Would you seriously say something like this to the guy who just had his house reduced to ash because of his association with Jesus?!
      - i. Who would do such a seemingly senseless thing?!
- D. I mean how would you feel? Think about the places of deep struggle in your life right now—the things that are just going so wrong, you can barely breathe sometimes, it feels like you’re suffocating under the weight of it.
- 1. Maybe it’s a long-standing relationship that’s just gone off the rails in recent months and you don’t know how to get it back.
  - 2. Maybe it’s a devastating diagnosis and it has you face down on the floor.
  - 3. Maybe your job is one of the thousands of hi-tech jobs in this Valley right now, in danger of being cut in coming days. And anxiety has you in its stranglehold.
    - a. You fill in the blank, whatever it is for you. Identify it. Feel it.
      - i. And then, imagine, in comes Paul, this great apostle of the Lord, and here’s what he says to you in that place of struggle and sorrow: “[G]ive thanks in all circumstances . . . .” Listen, if you don’t hit him, I’ll hit him for you!
- E. So, as far as I can see, we’ve got two options here: either Paul is totally insane, out of his mind . . . or he knows something we don’t.

### (3) The How

#### Not a Gloss-Coated Gratitude

A. Now, before we go anywhere on this, I should say, I don't think, when Paul is calling us to give thanks, he's calling us to some kind of cheap, gloss-coated gratitude—where we say it, but it's fake and we don't really mean it. We're just trying to be good Christians or whatever.

1. Even in this letter, back in [4:13](#), for example, he talks about the fact that we're going to "grieve." But he says, when we do, we don't grieve like the rest of the world—like those "who have no hope." We grieve like Christians who do.

a. So this is not merely a glad-hearted gratitude, as I've called it.

b. It's also a gritty gratitude. It's a graveside gratitude. It's a gratitude that's sometimes strangely mingled with the grief of life in a fallen world. We can give thanks to God even under cloud and gloom.

B. Don't you want that? Where does it come from? How do you get it?

#### "In Christ Jesus"

A. Well let's return to our verse and finish it out: "[G]ive thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" ([1 Thess. 5:18](#)).

1. The place to which I wish to direct your attention now is that little phrase there near the end: "in Christ Jesus . . ." That's where you find it. That's the secret sauce in all of this.

a. It's somehow unlocked in and through the person and work of Jesus for us.

B. And I think this little shoutout to Jesus here is meant to link us to what Paul says about him and his accomplishments for us elsewhere in this letter.

1. And, for the sake of time, I don't want to do too much with this. But it's great, we actually don't have to go very far to get an awful lot.

a. Bookending our verse, on either side of it really, there are these amazing gospel pronouncements that unveil for us what Jesus has done and what he's doing.

i. And I just want to show you these two texts and connect the dots to the glad-hearted and gritty gratitude that we can have in all circumstances.

#### Bookend #1: 1 Thess. 5:9-10

A. The first bookend comes there in [1 Thess. 5:9-10](#). Listen to this: "<sup>9</sup> God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."

1. It seems to me there's both a past and a future component to his work for us as its presented to us here. The idea, I think, is that we are surrounded by grace because of Jesus.

#### PAST GRACE

- A. On the one hand, we're told there in [v. 10](#) that Christ "died for us." This obviously occurred in the historical past, and it's something we can look back to and remember the love of God for us.
  1. As Paul puts it in [Rom. 5:8](#): "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
    - a. There was nothing in myself to commend me to God and yet still he gave up his only beloved Son to save me.
    - b. I was still a rogue creature, unwilling to bend a knee or offer thanks, out of sync with the universe, at odds with God, and yet Jesus came and laid his life down in love for me.
      - i. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" ([John 15:13](#)).
- B. He became the sacrifice for my sin, suffering under the wrath of God in my place, bearing my condemnation, undergoing my judgment . . . so that, in him, through repentance and faith, by grace, I could be forgiven and made acceptable—counted righteous, holy, blameless in the sight of God the Judge; adopted and welcomed into the family of God the Father.
- C. Listen, when you really take that in by faith, when you let God love you and forgive you and free you, it fills you up and it sets in motion that kind of gratitude we've been talking about.

#### FUTURE GRACE

- A. But there's more. For, on the other hand, this first bookend refers, not only to what Jesus has done for us in the past on the cross, it also refers to the kind of future Christ has secured for us by way of the cross.
  1. This is what I've already begun to allude to, but it comes out more forcibly and beautifully in what Paul says here. So he writes of our future: "<sup>9</sup>God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."
    - a. Do you hear the great future and hope that's been secured for you because of his death?
- B. I'm convinced that one of the main reasons we're given more to grumbling than gratitude, even as God's people, is that we're honestly not all that aware of what we've been saved from nor of what we've been saved for. Let me explain . . .
- C. Of the former, most of our grumbling and discontent comes about because we think we deserve better.

1. "I shouldn't have to wait in this line, I'm an important person with lots of important things to attend to."
  2. "I don't deserve to be treated this way by others. They're just jerks. I won't stand for it."
  3. "What did I do to deserve this diagnosis, this ailment in my body? I should have a comfortable, easygoing life. This isn't right."
  4. And so forth.
- D. We grumble because we think we deserve better. But God says, if I may, because of our sin, we deserve his wrath, we deserve hell.
1. To put it as bluntly as I can: God doesn't owe you anything but fire. Do you understand that?
    - a. If you don't, the cross won't move you, the gospel won't overwhelm you, and you won't have gratitude in all circumstances.
      - i. You might be able to say thanks when God finally comes around and blesses as you imagine you're entitled.
      - ii. But you have gratitude come whatever, even in the darkest of days.
- E. Now, I know people don't like to think too much about hell. But I'm telling you, if you are not willing to plumb the depths of what you truly deserve in and of yourself, you will not be able to ascend the heights of what you have been given in Christ.
1. You hollow out your joy and gratitude, ironically, in the name of joy and gratitude.
    - a. You want to have a better mood, so you don't want to think about such somber things.
    - b. But, in so doing, you dim your eyes to the glory of Christ and his grace.
      - i. You don't just turn away from the message of God's wrath, you turn also away from the message of his grace, they are two sides of the same coin.
- F. It works like a pendulum—the further you swing into the side of hell and wrath, the further you swing back into joy and contentment and gratitude, when you get the cross.
1. If you think you're not all that bad, you don't jump at the grace that's been given, you grumble when life doesn't work just as you wanted, as you feel you deserve.
- G. But then, of the latter, much of our grumbling comes about also because we have not really taken in what our destiny is in Jesus, what we've been saved for.
1. So Paul says: "[God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation . . .](#)" (v. 9)—which he sums up quite magnificently for us there in the closing words of v. 10 as "[liv\[ing\]](#)" with God.
    - a. We deserve wrath for our sin. We deserve God's fury.

b. But, because Jesus took it on that cross, we're not destined for wrath. We're destined for salvation. And we don't get his fury, we get his warm embrace. We get life with him in glory forever.

i. <sup>3</sup> "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.' <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' <sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21:3-5). That's your future! That's your destiny in Jesus!

H. And the reason we are not erupting with praise and thanks to God right now and always, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in momentarily, is due simply (and sadly!) to the fact that we don't regularly consider nor do we fully perceive what it is that God has in store for us.

1. "[N]o eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

a. Are we destined for affliction now, oh sure, but it's only momentary.

b. For, in an ultimate sense, we are destined not for affliction, but for salvation and for glory.

I. And if we would ever stop our muddling around here in the dirt and consider the bright heaven Jesus has won for us on that cross, the future we have in him . . . nothing could stifle our gratitude!

## Bookend #2: 1 Thess. 5:23-24

A. But there's even more that we're given "in Christ Jesus" to help us grow in gratitude. And here's where we come to Bookend #2 and the verses that follow our text in back in v. 18.

B. You see, it's not just that God has grace for us on either side—in the past, in the future—but he leaves us to fend for ourselves here in the present.

1. No! In my mind, the picture for me is something like past grace and future grace gathering as storm clouds overhead and cracking open with a fresh flood of grace for the present as well.

a. Jesus didn't just die for us in the past so we could be together with him someday off in the future merely.

b. He died for us so that he could be with us right now, in the midst of the mess, in whatever struggle we're facing.

## PRESENT GRACE

- A. So drop your eyes down now to vv. 23-24: “<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”
1. Do you see it? The essence of these verses is simply this: God is right here, right now, with you. He’s sanctifying you. He’s keeping you. He will be faithful to you to the end.
    - a. Notice the way Paul emphasizes it is “the God of peace himself . . .” who is doing this. I love that!
      - i. He hasn’t delegated this job to someone else, to one of his inferiors.
      - ii. The King himself has left the throne, as it were, to come down and tend to your heart and life, and to work in all things for your good.
- B. This is why we can give thanks, even in affliction.
1. Too often, we are tempted to think that our suffering indicates God’s absence—that he’s abandoned us.
  2. But the Scriptures teach us that—whether we believe it or not, whether we like it or not—our suffering is one of the ways he works on us; it’s one of the means by which he sanctifies us and shapes us in his image and keeps us on the narrow path.
    - a. Israel didn’t fall away in the hard times. They fell away in the good times.
      - i. It was the hard times that brought them back to their senses, that made them aware of their dependence on God for everything, and took them deeper into relationship with him.
    - b. The prodigal son doesn’t come to his right mind and return to his father when all is going well for him. Oh no!
      - i. He only awakens to such a thing when it all comes down and he thinks: “What am I doing here rolling in the mud with the pigs?”
        - (1) Do you think he was mad at God for the mudhole that moved his heart? No, he would praise God for the mud, he would kiss the rod that struck him, he would give thanks!
- C. For so many of us, that’s how we finally came to know God in the first place. Suffering paved the way to salvation. I realized I had need of God and grace.
1. And you know, suffering is still part of the way God keeps us near.
    - a. This is why Paul says earlier in Rom. 5: “<sup>3</sup> [W]e rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,<sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,<sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (vv. 3–5).

