

Father, we thank you for the truth that has just been proclaimed, that we have something to be grateful for. I pray that as we move into this message and we listen to your word Spirit, that we would hear your voice of encouragement, of challenge, of direction, that we would consider your words this morning. Lord, in your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

I want to have you think, if you've ever had this happen to you before, where you are walking down the hallway with a very specific purpose in mind. You get about halfway down the hallway and all of a sudden you have no idea why you were walking down the hall.

I don't know if that's your situation. Very often that has happened to me before. If you know me a little bit, you know that one of my weaknesses is that I'm forgetful. If you know me very well, you've experienced my forgetfulness, and you could tell me a way in which my forgetfulness has inconvenienced you. I need and depend on reminders.

I have reminders all over the place. I love the reminder app on my iPhone. I love the to do list on the Microsoft Outlook suite. I need reminders to put salt in my water softener. I need reminders to change the air filter, reminders of what I need to get at the store, reminders of when I'm going to get a haircut, reminders of when I let my dog outside, reminders to don't forget about them, let them back in at some point.

Reminders are so helpful, you know that we're in a sermon series right now, just the second week into a sermon series on gratitude. And one of the realities that we experience in life is what is called, or what Pastor David often calls spiritual amnesia, which is our tendency to forget the good things that the Lord has done for us. So. So in the midst of forgetting the good things that God has done for us, the antidote to our spiritual amnesia is gratitude. So I want to consider that with you this morning.

Gratitude as the antidote to our spiritual amnesia, or gratitude as the reminder in the midst of our spiritual forgetfulness. So if we were to zoom in on the label of gratitude as reminder, we might read something like this. This on the label that Paul writes to the Thessalonians in 1st Thessalonians 5, 16, 18, he writes this. It says, rejoice always, pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now, I wonder how that strikes you when you hear that. Do you think, do you know what's going on in my life right now. And I would say, if it was on my authority that I was bringing this statement to you, this call to be joyful always and pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances. If that was coming from my authority, then you would have the right to say, Brently, have you no idea what's going on in my life right now? Brently, I think you're from another planet.

This doesn't apply at all to me. And you'd be right in dismissing my counsel if this was on my authority. Since I believe that these words come from God's inspired word, from the inspired word of the Creator of the universe, since it comes on that kind of authority. I think we need to hold this and pause and consider. What does this mean to be joyful always, to pray continually, to give thanks in all circumstances, in the midst of what we all know is a life that is filled with, yes, reasons for joy, but also pain and inconvenience and terrible things going on around this community and communities around this country and around the world.

How is it that we can be called to rejoice always in the midst of all of that? And the question is, right, and I don't want to ignore that two things going on here. The Lord is calling us to this kind of gratitude, the kind of gratitude that rejoices always, prays continually and give thanks in all circumstances. And we realize that we live in a life and we see examples in Scripture where lament is a part of life. In fact, you read through the Psalms and there's perhaps more lament than there is thanksgiving.

So we know that God is calling us to gratitude, and we know that lament plays a large role in our life. So this morning we're gonna talk about gratitude and focus on that specifically. But that is not to ignore or minimize the reality that lament coexist with gratitude. We'll focus on gratitude this morning. There'll be a couple weeks from now that we'll spend more time on the lament side of things.

But I want to focus on gratitude this morning to establish a foundational understanding of gratitude as this reminder of

what God has done for us and who he is. So I want to grow our understanding of this reminder and then get it written, this specific reminder from first Thessalonians. I want to get it written on our head and in our heart like a post it note that is all over us. So we'll start by simply repeating that. I want to get your mind to engage with the passage, so I'm going to repeat it Just phrase.

Say it phrase by phrase and have you repeat after me. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus.

All right, we're beginning to get it in. I want to illustrate this actually with. With a concept this morning or with two things that you might be familiar with, but it might surprise you a little bit. So I want to illustrate it with the ideas of angular momentum and inertia. All right, that surprise you?

You're wondering, where is that coming from? So we'll get there. So angular momentum, you know, momentum, probably from your physics classes. It's mass plus velocity, right? Angular momentum, is that happening in a circle?

Okay, we also want to talk about inertia, which is. Inertia is that which is in motion has a tendency to stay in motion until or unless it's operated on by an outside force. Okay, so there's your physics lesson for the day from a non physics teacher. But I want to further illustrate that with something that we're all familiar with, and that is a merry go round and a top. So think about a merry go round.

You probably didn't experience it or haven't experienced it since elementary school, but an elementary school student, I think for me, as an elementary school student, you go to the playground and you can't wait to get on the merry go round. And the fun thing about the merry go round is when it's spinning around, you want to try to jump onto the moving merry go round, right? So you know, now this is interesting. You as an elementary school student, you probably cannot define angular momentum and inertia, but you know what it is, because, you know, if that merry go round has not much weight on it and it's not moving very fast, then the outside force can come in and jump right on. You also know that if that merry go round has a lot of weight on it and it's moving very fast, then it has a lot of resistance to any outside forces coming in or while it has this angular momentum that's swinging around.

All right, you know that the other illustration that we'll think about is a top. A top is this simple plastic object that on its own it cannot stand up, it just wobbles and falls to the ground. But with angular momentum, as it's spinning around, it has stability. And the more angular momentum it has, the more stability it has. Okay, so now we want to apply those principles to the living out of this first Thessalonians 5, 16, 18 verse.

So how do we do that how does this apply to this idea of rejoicing, always praying continually and giving thanks in all circumstances? First, we'll define joy. I think a good definition of biblical joy in the biblical context is this. It's a steady confidence in the goodness of God no matter what. So that is to say joy isn't always like that, right?

I mean, sometimes joy is this. It's steady confidence. It's just so it looks different, right? Joy is a steady confidence in the goodness of God no matter what. Prayer.

Prayer is a conversation with God. I like to think of it in three things. Prayer is listening to God's Word that He has given us that we all have access to, listening to His Word. And as we listen to His Word, as we get to know His Word, then we can even step away from His Word. And the Holy Spirit reminds us of His Word and carries it with us when it's not open right in front of us.

So prayer is first, listening to God in His Word. It's second, responding to that with your thoughts and your follow up questions. And third, it's listening more to his reply. So that's prayer. That's conversation with the Lord.

Giving thanks is clear. That's acknowledging God's role in or around whatever certain circumstance we're experiencing in the moment. So here's the truth. With rejoicing always, praying continually and giving thanks in all circumstances. There's a spectrum with each of those things.

With joy, I can be placing a little bit of confidence in the goodness of God, or I can have a steady confidence in the

goodness of God no matter what, and everything in between. With prayer, I can sometimes have conversation with God, or I could be having conversation with God, listening to him, what he's telling me continually and everything in the middle. With giving thanks, I can give thanks in some circumstances, or I can give thanks in all circumstances or anything in the middle. So there's this spectrum. But I want to start simple and be reminded of this idea.

And that increased momentum strengthens the resistance to outside forces. So the more I lean into each of these ideas, each of these movements, and the more I fluidly or quickly move from one to the other, the more strengthened resistance is built up against the outside forces, AKA obstacles to our gratitude. The more we build up this angular momentum from joy to prayer to thanksgiving, to joy to prayer to thanksgiving. So I want to play that out with you this morning by thinking through some scenarios and listening to some of God's Word together. So first you might look outside and say, you know, wow, the snow this morning is beautiful.

God's creation is beautiful. And I can begin to take in a small amount of confidence in the goodness of God by what I view in his creation. And as I think about taking joy in God's creation, then I listen to and I hear what he says to me through his word in Psalm 8, where I hear the psalmist say, lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth you have set your glory in the heavens. When I consider your heavens and the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you have set in place. What is mankind?

That you are mindful of them. That you are mindful of me, human beings, that you care for them. So I hear these words from the Lord, and I might think also of his word in 1st John 3:1 as he says, how great is the love of the Father that he has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And I've moved to thanks as I listen to these words of the majesty of God, and as I listen to these words of his love for me. And I move to thanks to say, thanks, Creator God, for all that you've created and that you would have me in mind.

And I have this My gratitude top is beginning to spin, right? I'm building some angular momentum and obstacles come in life. And maybe the obstacle is simply you're stuck in traffic and that's annoying. Or you order a meal from a restaurant and you get cold fries and that's annoying. But that obstacle, you've built up a little bit of momentum, angular momentum in your gratitude top.

And that angular momentum can resist these obstacles. It doesn't make them vanish. But it means your gratitude does not stop spinning. So you take joy. Your joy deepens as you consider your confidence in the goodness of God.

You continue to listen to him in prayer, and you consider a psalm like Psalm 139 that says, you have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue, you, Lord, know it completely. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. We listen to the Lord's words and these reminders of how he has made us in this beautiful way we think of we remember this passage from Zephaniah 3:17 and we listened to him speaking to us as it says, the Lord your God is with you. The mighty warrior who saves, he will take great delight in you. In his love, he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. As I think about the way that the Lord has knit me together, as I think about him singing over me, then my thanksgiving grows and I say, Father, thank you that you have created me in such a way.

And thank you that by your grace you sing your love over me. And this momentum of my gratitude top is growing. And obstacles keep coming in life, and honestly, they get larger. We think of an obstacle, like you're dating someone and you break up and that hurts. Or you don't make the team or the group that you wanted to make, or you have trouble at work and these obstacles come in, they don't vanish.

But it doesn't stop. This gratitude top that you have moving. The momentum keeps growing. Your joy gets deeper. You listen to the Lord and you hear his words in a psalm like Psalm 19, and you hear him say, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

So we hear this and we say, God, you, even the commands you give us, they are what we need. They are perfect, and they are right. We hear the Lord's word to us in John 15, verses 9 through 11, where Jesus declares, he says, as the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that you may have that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. So we look to the Lord and we say, God, not only have you given us these commands that are good and right for us, but you have shown us how obedience to your commands are connected with my experience of your love. Father, thank you for this incredible way that you have created your counsel for us and you give thanks to God. And this momentum keeps growing your gratitude top. It's building up this momentum and.

And obstacles keep coming, and again they keep getting larger. You deal with something like a job loss and that job loss. While your gratitude doesn't make that job loss vanish, that angular momentum, it keeps on spinning and that obstacle doesn't stop it. So your joy deepens and you listen to this prayer and you resound with this prayer that Paul prays in Ephesians when he instructs, he says, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with thanksgiving, through prayer and petition, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And you say, God, I'm beginning to experience that. I feel this peace that passes all understanding. These obstacles keep coming. They're not going away. But I feel your peace that passes understanding in the midst of that.

And you give God thanks for this incredible peace that he's blessed you with. And your momentum keeps on growing. The obstacles in life keep on coming. You might face something like a life changing illness that you have or that someone that you love has these kinds of obstacles. They would have completely knocked your top over you years ago, but you have built up such momentum in this gratitude top that now, yes, those obstacles don't vanish, but they don't stop this gratitude top from spinning.

Your joy deepens. You listen to the Lord and what he has to say to you. And you hear his words through Paul. In Philippians 4:11 and 12, Paul declares, I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to be have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. And if you know Philippians, if you know Paul's writing, you know that the secret he's talking about is what he articulates in Philippians 3:8 when he says, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. That is the secret to his contentment. Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ. So you look to the Lord and you say, lord, I am experiencing that I know you, Jesus, in a way that I have not known you before.

And in the midst of knowing, I would rather know you than anything else in all of the world. Come obstacles as they may. I want to know you because I know that is greatest. So this momentum, it just keeps on building. You face obstacles.

Something like a tragedy happens, whether it's the death of a loved one or whether it's the infidelity of a spouse. And those things that would have absolutely derailed your gratitude at a different time in life. Now you have built up the momentum that your gratitude just keeps on spinning. The obstacles do not vanish, but they don't defeat your gratitude. Paul testifies to this kind of state in the midst of very significant trials when he can sincerely say he declares in 2nd Corinthians 4:16, 17, he says, Therefore we do not lose heart.

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary

troubles. He's calling some significant difficulty and tragedies light and momentary troubles, for we do not lose heart for a light, momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Paul can say this sincerely because his gratitude is spinning like a top. It is whirling around like a merry go round. My desire for each of us is that this would be the case for us, that our gratitude top would be spinning and spinning.

Now, I don't want you to misunderstand my words or these passages. I'm not suggesting an attitude that denies or ignores difficulty. I'm trying to explain a heart posture that is not deterred or defeated by difficulty, but a heart posture that rejoices always, that prays continually, that gives thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus. I hope as you hear this that you don't hear this, as this is a heavy burden that only some people and some amounts of spiritual maturity in can handle this. This call to be joyful always, to pray continually and to give thanks in all circumstances.

But this is an invitation to sit and listen. Listen to the Lord's Word that He wants to speak to us. And the Spirit loves to take that conversation as we are listening to His Word and responding to His Word. The Spirit loves to take that conversation and transform our hearts and our minds. It's not work of what I'm doing to have this incredible gratitude in the midst of anything.

It is me listening to the Spirit of God and allowing His Word to transform my heart and my mind.

Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances.

This Grammatically this is an imperative. But when we hear it in the context of Scripture, knowing the gentle and compassionate heart of God, this is an invitation. This is a reminder that we all need in the midst of our forgetfulness. I want to close by practicing this reminder by maybe building up or pressing along a little momentum on this gratitude top. So I want to invite the worship team to come up and I want to end by just having you listen to some of the Lord's words to us in two final passages.

So it may even be that you close your eyes and listen to what he tells us in Psalm 18 and then in Ephesians.

I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress. My God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I called to the Lord who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. The cords of death entangled me.

The torrents of destruction, they overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me. Snares of death, they confronted me in my distress. I called to the Lord. I cried to my God for help.

From his temple he heard my voice. My cry came before him into his ears. He reached down from on high and took hold of me. He drew me up out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, my foe from my foes who too were too strong for me.

They confronted me in the day of my disaster. But the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place. He rescued me because he delighted in me. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, for He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love. He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely gives us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood for the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. Father, we want to soak in your words to us your beautiful reminders of who you are and what you have done. And may it be that as we soak in your word, we move into thanks and joy and more conversation with you.

We thank you, Lord, for who you are, and we want to sit under your voice. In your name, Jesus, I pray Amen.