"Are You Living in Waiting Rooms or Waiting in Living Rooms?"

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

16 Be joyful always; 17 Pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything, hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil.

23 May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (NIV)

My wife thought that I should relieve your fears and let you know that the length of the sermon has nothing to do with the length of the title. When Amy heard that the title was "Are You Living in Waiting Rooms or Waiting in Living Rooms?" she got a little worried so she discreetly asked my how long my sermon was. My answer to her is the same as my answer to you. Just long enough. **[NOTE 1]**

Paul starts out our passage for this morning by giving us three aspects of one attitude: the attitude of the Christian. These Three aspects or activities should characterize every Christian, every follower of Jesus Christ. They are short but they carry much meaning. In fact, at first glance, they may seem impossible. But let's not view them as requirements for us to meet and throw up our hands thinking it is just too difficult. Rather, let us view them as attitudes that are possible for us to experience and have in our lives because of the Holy Spirit's work through Jesus Christ in our lives. We only need to look at our first and foremost example, Jesus Christ to see what these three aspects/attitudes or activities look like in real life. Not only is it in Christ that the will of God is revealed, but it is in Him that the power is given to us to enable us to live according to that will. Living according to God's will includes being joyful always, praying continually, and giving thanks in all circumstances.

Let's take a closer look at these three aspects of the truly Christian attitude. First is "Be joyful always." As some might think, this is not a command to be happy at all times. Please don't ask me to feel happy after I've just smashed my thumb with a hammer or after the Packers lose a game to the Minnesota Viqueens. But neither smashing my thumb or the Packers losing a game have anything to do with my joy and rejoicing in life. A person simply can't be happy at all times. But there can be a basic sense of joy in your life, because you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You can have an underlying joy in your life because you know that in the end, Christ wins and if we are "In Christ" we win! As Christ-followers, being joyful always means that we interpret life in light of the fact that we are children of the heavenly Father. If Christ is on the throne of our lives, the spiritual resources are so great that earthly things cannot disturb our composure and we can go on our way rejoicing with a song in our heart. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. So it is certainly not referring to the come and go

feeling of happiness. That's why in verse 19 Paul writes, "Do not quench the Holy Spirit." Make joy, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a significant part of your life.

Another thing we need to realize is that joy is a choice. Look at the circumstances of the Thessalonian Christians. They were being persecuted and ridiculed, even tortured for their faith, yet they chose to think of their Lord Jesus Christ more than their difficulties, more of their spiritual riches in Christ than their earthly poverty, more of their glorious future when their Lord comes again than of their unhappy past or present. Please pay attention to this. You can choose how you feel. You choose whether to be thrown into despair over the absolute craziness in our nation right now or whether you will focus on serving Jesus Christ and focus on the fact that He is sovereign! As Christ-followers we are called to turn our thoughts away from ourselves to the great God who has wrought a wonderful salvation for us in Christ. Whatever happens, however we feel, we can always choose to rejoice in the Lord. It is also true that you choose how you feel as well. You don't have to be a slave to your feelings. You choose what you focus on, you choose whether you will count your blessings or focus on how bad things are.

"Pray continually," does not mean that we are to spend 24 hours a day seven days a week on our knees in formal, audible prayer. It is an attitude and notion of motivation that all we have and experience is from the Lord! It is to think and live in the presence of God; it's an awareness that God is always present. If we pray continually, we make all our decisions, all day long, with God in mind. An analogy might be how one thinks and acts when they are in love. Everything they do all day long, what they think, the decisions they make, everything is influenced by the constant presence in their thoughts of their loved one. That's how God should be to us 24/7. God should fill our minds and hearts so as to affect everything we do. Please don't think or say, I tried that already and it doesn't work. Praying is a good and powerful habit that we develop over time. Just keep practicing, just keep practicing, what do we do we practice praying! (That's a take off from NEMO where Dori keeps singing "just keep swimming.") I hope at least a couple of you got the reference. The idea is that you just keep taking baby steps, practicing and not giving up, persevering, and you will find yourself getting better and better at thinking about God all day long and continually talking to Him in prayer.

We read in Romans chapter eight that in everything, God is at work for good. When someone comes to see that God, in Christ, has saved him/her; everything is altered. Now, it is apparent that God's purpose is being worked out. The same loving purpose is being worked out even in those events which the believer is inclined not to welcome at all. When we come to realize that God's hand is in all things, we learn to give thanks for all things. Tribulation is unpleasant. Yet in the midst of tribulation who would not give thanks, knowing that the Father who loves us so greatly has permitted that tribulation only in order that his wise and merciful purpose might be worked out? While I might not be able to give thanks for all of the things that happen, I can give thanks in everything, for the confidence that God is always present and is always at work for good.

Is there anything more annoying or exasperating than going to a favorite place only to find you'll have to wait in a long line to get in? Of course the slowest and longest lines occur at the most favorite of places but also sometimes even at your least favorite places like the emergency room or the dentist. There are other infamous lines or waiting rooms. Like the day-devouring lines you face at the dreaded Secretary of State. Why does it seem like it is the goal of the employees there to force you to stand in every single one of their mystery lines only to tell you that you don't have the necessary information or proofs or tags so you have to go home only to come back and wait in line all over again. Or how about the unemployment office, to get paid? In addition to suffering the depression and desperation that comes with joblessness, you get to endure hours in a humiliating line up, just to get the chance to prove you really are still out of work and need the money to pay bills.

We all hate to wait. Why else would we need faster and faster computers, fax machines (yes they still make them), microwaves, overnight delivery, express check-out lanes, and drive thru food lanes. We have so many demands on our time, so many things going on, such busy lives, that we consider any time spent waiting as time hopelessly lost. Sound familiar? If you can't relate, please talk to me after the service, I need what you have.

Paul is reminding the Thessalonians here in chapter five that every moment of life lived with the Holy Spirit is filled with promise and possibility. Be joyful, be prayerful, be thankful!! No matter what the circumstances be joyful, be prayerful, and be thankful! Jesus lived this attitude. Don't believe me, open your Bible to any of the gospels and read about Jesus' life. He lived it. Jesus saw every moment as being open to **[NOTE 2]** transcendence: Sabbath day wanderings in a field, fruitless fishing expeditions, time spent waiting by a Samaritan well, the hours before His arrest and crucifixion—all were times equally ripe for God to use Him as a messenger proclaiming the Good News. I propose to you this morning that Jesus didn't know any waiting rooms—He only knew living rooms. Even while waiting or experiencing down time he spent it living to the full! While we might complain that we spend too much time living in waiting rooms, Jesus spent His entire ministry as far as I can tell, waiting in living rooms. Jesus hung around with Mary and Martha while they cooked and cleaned, He arrived early for dinner parties and stayed late, He walked in the midst of crowds when He might have ridden or sailed to his destination. Our text tells us that there can be joy, love, life, and laughter in every situation, at all times.

Some people call verses 16-18 the standing orders of the church. They are all in the imperative mood, forceful commands directing our attitudes and actions. Joy, prayer and thankfulness are not just for when you feel like it. They are for choosing each and every moment of life. For today's message, let us take that as an exhortation to make wherever we find ourselves, a living room where we choose to be joyful, choose to pray, and choose to be thankful.

John the Baptist filled his days making straight the way of the Lord in the living rooms of the wilderness. He didn't just sit around and complain about the waiting rooms he waited in the living room. In Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 31 it says, "Those who WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up like eagles, with wings of great length, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." We need to wait in the living rooms of life. As you go through each day make every room you are in, a room with life in it, a place with possibilities.

I know this doesn't track very well with today's society. Most people have their best furniture in their living room and hardly anyone ever sits in there, unless company comes over or you are "entertaining." It used to be way worse. I think that in the house I grew up in, my family would go months at a time and never use the Living Room. The TV was in the family room and we sat in there, ate in there, did most of our living in the family room (at least that's what we called it). It really was an open floor plan with the family room, dining room and kitchen all open to one another. But now my sister owns the house and the TV is in the living room. All of the comfortable furniture is in the living room and actual "living" takes place in that room now. So I am asking you today to make any room you enter, a room with life in it. Don't let your life be spent in waiting rooms. Keep on choosing joy, choosing prayer, and choosing thankfulness.

When we put off prayer for Sunday morning, confine thankfulness to a quick grace before meals, and squeeze all our joy into a few weeks around Christmas and Easter, we confine our faith to a waiting room. Consider all the waiting rooms you might find yourself in during the next few weeks: at cash registers, at the McDonalds, in drive thru lines, cruising for a parking space closer to the front door, in line at the ATM machine—all are opportunities to feel frustration or to feel joy, to offer up prayers or snarl out curses, to be thankful for all that you do have or feel envy for the things that are beyond your reach. **[NOTE 3]**

Let's transform our waiting rooms into living rooms by being joyful, praying continually, and giving thanks in all circumstances. Tap into the power of the Holy Spirit. When you come upon a "waiting room" situation, feel the glow of the Holy Spirit and remember the life altering power of possibilities. You choose what you focus on and you choose your reaction to life. To a large extent, You can't choose what happens to you, but you can choose how you react to it.

Waiting rooms can even become windows into the eternal. Here is Frank Laubach's discovery of a safe place: "Are you building sacred palaces for yourself? I meant to type places to be sure, but think I shall leave the word palaces, for that is what any house becomes when it is sacred The most important discovery of my whole life is that one can take a little rough cabin and transform it into a palace just by flooding it with thoughts of God. When one has spent many months in a little house like that in daily thought about God, the very entering of the house, the very sight of it as one approaches, starts associations that set the heart tingling and the mind flowing. I have come to the point where I must have my house in order to write the best letters or think

the richest thoughts. So in this sense one person after another builds his/her own heaven or his/her hell. It does not matter where one is, one can at once begin to build heaven, or begin to build a terrible place just by the thoughts that one thinks while in that place … I have learned the secret of heaven-building … anywhere." **[NOTE 4]**

What Paul and Jesus Christ are calling us to do this morning is to wait in the living rooms of life, instead of living in waiting rooms. Be joyful always, pray continually, and always give thanks. Start to practice those things and transform everywhere you find yourself, is a living room. A room filled with life and possibilities and not filled with sorrows and depression. Is it easy? NO! But keep on keeping on taking baby steps and all of a sudden you will find yourself in a better place. Let's pray … AMEN

Sermon Notes for "Are You Living in Waiting Rooms or Waiting in Living Rooms"
Based on 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24 given October 4, 2026
at Doster Community Church

I. Three aspects or activities of all good Christ-followers:
   a. Be joyful always
   b. Pray Continually
   c. Give thanks in all circumstances

II. Jesus didn't know any waiting rooms, only living rooms. Jesus waited in living rooms! Make wherever you are, a living room where we choose to be joyful, choose to pray, and choose to be thankful.

III. You can't choose what happens to you in life. But you can choose how you react to it! You choose to love, to be joyful, give thanks, and to pray!

What are you going to do about it? Practice and transform everywhere you find yourself into a living room! (filled with life a