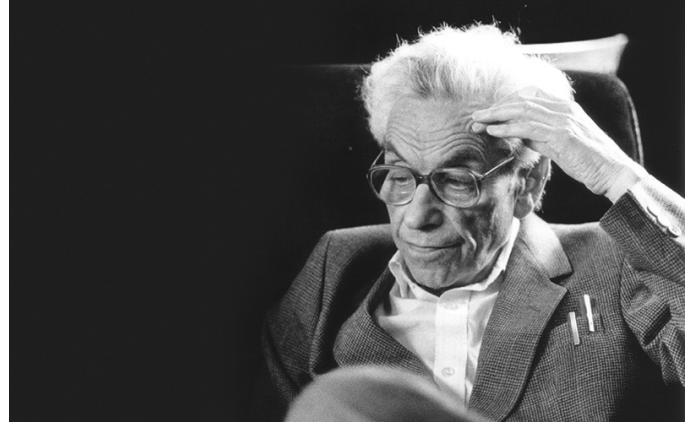


One + One = Thanksgiving

On March 26, 1913, Paul Erdos was born in Budapest, Hungary. Paul Erdos is considered by many to be one of the greatest mathematicians of all time. He is what we would call a mathematical genius. When Paul Erdos was three years old, he could multiply three digit numbers in his head, and he would amuse visitors by asking their ages and



then computing how many seconds they had lived. As an adult, Paul Erdos did mathematics 19 hours a day, seven days a week. He could recite the details of all 1,475 of the scholarly papers he had written or co-authored. Paul Erdos is considered by many to be one of the greatest mathematicians of all times.

2000 years ago, there lived another man named Paul. The Paul I'm referring to wasn't a great mathematician. The Paul I'm referring to was a great Christian, evangelist, missionary, and pastor. Of course, the Paul that I'm thinking of was the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul may not have been a mathematical genius like Paul Erdos, but in *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*, the great New Testament writer Paul shared with the Christians at Thessalonica a mathematical formula that should be applied to the Christian life.

Look in your Bible to *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*.

The Apostle Paul is winding down this beautiful, classic letter to the Thessalonian Christians. As he draws his teachings to a close, he does so with short, bullet-like statements. There are many passages of Scripture in which *thanks*, *thanksgiving*, and *thankfulness* are mentioned. But none of those passages are exactly like this passage. Just as $1 + 1 = 2$ and $2 + 2 = 4$, these three verses seem to comprise a mathematical formula: **1 + 1 = Thanksgiving**. Let's read *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18* to see if we can get a clearer understanding of what the Apostle Paul is talking about.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV) – “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Let's look at this formula:

One – “Be joyful always.” In *verse 16* of our text, Paul says, “*Be joyful always.*” You will notice that these verses are **commands**, not suggestions or advice. They are commands: “*Be joyful always.*”

This “joy” of which Paul speaks in *verse 16* is the kind of joy that we are to possess as a result of having a one-on-one relationship with Jesus Christ. **As humans, we are naturally happy when our circumstances are good.** When our health is good, when we have money in the bank, when things at school are right, we are naturally happy. But for those of us who are Christians, we should possess a joy that is not dependent on our circumstances. Our joy comes from the Savior who lives and resides in us, and no matter how difficult the circumstances, we can still experience joy. That’s the kind of joy Paul is referring to when he commands us to: “*Be joyful always!*”

The truth of the matter is, there should be no circumstances in life that for a prolonged period of time overwhelm our relationship with Jesus Christ, and thus, rob our joy. Granted, there are times in our Christian life when we may lose our spiritual joy for a period of time. We just feel as if we’re going through the motions, we’re just going through the routine. But hopefully, because of the Savior who lives inside of us, the joy that Jesus brings will bubble to the surface and bring Christian joy, peace, and happiness that supersede our circumstances and situations. Paul says, “*Be joyful always.*”

One of the major issues I deal with on a regular basis as a pastoral counselor are questions like: “Why me, Lord?” “Is God mad at me?” “What have I done to anger God that He would allow my marriage to fall apart?” “Why did God allow this illness to attack my body?” “Why is God allowing this...to happen to my family?”

Many Christians, immersed deep in their illness or deep in their difficult circumstances, will ask those agonizing questions. That is one of the primary reasons why you need good, solid, Christian friends. They can help you to remain steady in the crisis times of life. Your friends from your Sunday School class, other Christian friends, can help you stay focused on Jesus and your faith in Him rather than focusing all your energy on your problems and circumstances. Paul commands us, “*Rejoice always,*” not only in the good times, but in those times when things are

difficult, hard, and bad. For those of us who are Christians, the difficult times enable us to appreciate the good and the easy times all the more.

[EX:] *Lessons I Learned in the Dark* by Jennifer Rothschild – “Even when it is not well with our circumstances, it can be well with our souls.”

+ **One** - The first part of the Apostle Paul’s mathematical equation is “*Be joyful always.*” The next part of the mathematical equation is: “*Pray continually.*” In *verse 17*, Paul gives us another command: “*Pray continually.*” One (“*Be joyful always*”) + One (“*Pray continually*”).

Does this mean that 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we are to be on our knees in prayer? No! What Paul is referring to is a continual, regular, unceasing prayer life. That means, in the morning time as we are getting ready for the activities of the day, we can be in an attitude of prayer. When we have just a few minutes alone, when someone’s not competing for our attention, we can be in an attitude of prayer.

Prayer isn’t just something we do before a meal or before we go to bed. Prayer is to be a lifestyle of continual, regular, unceasing communication—fellowship with our Heavenly Father. (Paul says... “*Pray continually.*”)

But many times, instead of obeying God’s command to be in a continual attitude of prayer, what we are guilty of is rushing through the day, pre-occupying ourselves with so many other things that we neglect to pray. And the result is, we don’t experience God’s power, strength, and presence in our lives.

Power of Prayer

I got up early one morning and rushed into the day;

I had so much to accomplish that I didn’t have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me, and heavier came each task.

“Why doesn’t God help me?” I wondered. He answered, “You didn’t ask.”

I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on, gray and bleak

I wondered why God didn’t show me. He said, “But you didn’t seek.”

I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock.

God gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning, and paused before entering the day;

I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.

In mathematics, one plus one always equals two. Two plus two always equals four. In Paul's mathematical formula, he gives us this equation:

"Be joyful always" (One). "Pray continually" (One). This always equals (=) Thanksgiving.

What Paul is telling us is:

"If we strive to have a continual attitude of joy,"

PLUS

"If we strive to be in a continual attitude of prayer,"

THE END RESULT IS,

"Under all circumstances, we are going to have a constant attitude of thanksgiving."

It's easy to be thankful when our health is good and our family is well; it's easy to be thankful when we have a job, when there is little stress, and we have enough money to pay our bills. It's easy to be thankful when the future looks bright. But it's something else to be joyful always, to pray without ceasing, to give thanks under all circumstances, when: You've been diagnosed with cancer;

You've lost a loved one;

You have a child or grandchild who is living outside of God's will;

A divorce has turned your life upside down;

At the end of the month you have more bills than money.

There are the circumstances that require all the spiritual resources we can muster. If our faith and our lives have been grounded in the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, we will be able to stand strong and be thankful even in the hard times.

A faith that is unexercised, a faith that is shallow will not come through or it will not rise to the surface when we need it during the trials of life. Because faith is like a muscle. When a muscle is exercised

regularly and properly, it will work well and can be depended upon to perform during a crisis.

That's the way faith works. When faith is worked, practiced, exercised, it will be there when you need it. And so, when we rejoice always, pray continually, have an attitude of thanksgiving even in the hard times, our faith grows and becomes stronger. The result is, we become stronger people.

Conclusion

How often during the Thanksgiving season do people ask, "What are you thankful for?" The responses are usually: family, friends, church, food, good jobs. There is nothing wrong with these responses.

But how often are we thankful for those times of insecurity when the flooring beneath us becomes a bit crumbly and the foundation turns to "quick sand," threatening to swallow us? But isn't that where we spend a lot of our lives? Those wobbly times help us appreciate the good, solid, easy times in life.

So, next time one of those teetering, quaking, shivering, brittle, crunchy, rubbery, slippery times come—and they will come—see this as a time to put all your joy and faith into action. See this as an opportunity to be thankful. Your faith will grow, but most importantly, you will grow as a person.

One ("Be joyful always.") + One ("Pray continually.") = Thanksgiving.

"In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

