The First Step

A message delivered to
MAYER COMMUNITY CHURCH

January 24, 1999

TITLE: The First Step

TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 5:18

THEME: Thanksgiving

THRUST: We try to run before we learn to walk!

INTRODUCTION:

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A husband gave his wife a beautiful skunk coat for Christmas one year. When his wife opened up the beautifully wrapped package, she said, "I can't see how such a nice coat can come from such a foul smelling little beast." The husband replied, "I don't ask for thanks, but I do demand respect."

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We spent the last two weeks considering
the impact that stress has on our lives,
and what our response to it should be.
There is no doubt, or at least there should be no doubt,
that God's desire for us *in* our stress
is to bring us *out* victorious.
There are numerous Scriptures that point us to that truth!

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Rom 8:37 No, in all these things *we are more than conquerors* through him who loved us.
1 Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God! He *gives us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 Cor 2:14 But thanks be to God, *who always leads us in triumphal procession* in Christ and through us spreads *everywhere* the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

God's desire for His people
is that we live victorious lives, *all the time,*
not enslaved by our emotions,
nor squashed by the pressure and power of sin,
but, to live completely free!
Did you catch the result of *victorious living*?
"...through us spreads *everywhere* the fragrance
of the knowledge of him."

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President Woodrow Wilson told this story. He said: "I was in a very common place, I was sitting in a barber chair, when I became aware that a personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself -- to have his hair cut and sat in the chair next to me. Every word the man uttered showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him. And before I got through with what was being done for me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service. Because Mr. D.L. Moody was in that chair.

I purposely lingered in the room after he had left and noted the singular effect that his visit had brought upon the barbershop. They didn't know his name but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts and I felt that I left that place as I should have left the place of worship.

My admiration and esteem for Mr. Moody became very deep indeed."

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What exactly happened?
D.L.Moody left behind the sweet fragrance of Jesus!
According to **2 Cor 2:14** if we are not experiencing victory
in our stress ... we are not being led by God
because God doesn't lead us into defeat — only victory!

Ps 106:47 Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory (**triumph**-KJV) in your praise.

How does this happen?
How do we get to the place where we *glory* in God's praise.
We have come to understand that it is not magic,
nor is it a dark mystery or something mechanical.

I. Victory Happens Because it was Planned

God did not plan for you and I to live a life of defeat.
God planned for you and I to be victorious — always!
Each and every time!
If we are *not* experiencing victory,
it is not because God did not adequately plan,
but that we failed to walk according to His plan.
God's will does not cause you and I to fail,
but God does have a will in our failure.
Victory happens not only because it was planned for, but

II. Victory Happens Because it was Provided for

That Scripture in **2 Corinthians** tells us
not only that our victory can and should be perpetual,
but that it is rooted in the person of Jesus.
What **W**ould **J**esus **H**ave **M**e **D**o?
Take the first step!
Do you know what comes after the *first step*?
Most would answer the *second step* or the *next step*.
Not so, it is the *First Step* all over again!
In other words, our Christian experience
is a *First Step* repeated ***continually*!**
Too often, we as Christians try to run before

we have adequately learned to walk!
What is *running?*
Isn't it just doing that *first step*
over and over real fast?
Running is a display of the confidence we have gained
in our ability to take that *first step*!
We are going to be looking more
into that aspect of Christian living, D.V. on February 14th.
For now, will it suffice to say that confidence is a result?
If you are living in poverty, is it God's will that you be rich?
Many would have us believe it is,
and show us all the steps to take
in order to exchange our poverty for riches.
We would, however, have missed the ***First Step!***
If you are sick, is it God's will that you be healthy?
Many would have us to believe it is,
and show us all the steps to take
in order to exchange our sickness for His health.
We may, however, have missed the ***First Step!***
Is it God's will that you come out of your stress
with your faith intact and completely victorious?
We can show through Scripture that it is.
In fact, that is one of the things we have seen
these past two weeks!
But, we may have missed the ***First Step!***
Do you know what happens to people who miss the *first step*?
They stumble! Often times, they fall!
Then they get back up and try it all over again,
missing the *first step* and repeating the whole process!
Many of you, when you come into this sanctuary,
refuse, for one reason or another,
to take the *first step* that is offered!
We have a phrase that helps us order our lives
"First things first!" Real profound, isn't it?
Yet, when it comes to *Christian living*
our practice is "Second ... third ... fourth things first!"
We want to be "microwave Christians!"
Push a button and 30 seconds later be on fire for Jesus!
I told someone on Wednesday night
"There is no *fast* lane on the Highway of Holiness!"
That is *not* to say that there aren't a lot of slowpokes!
In order to *walk that Highway* and *run the race* that is before us,

We **must** learn and consistently practice the ***First Step!***

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Corrie Ten Boom in her book, The Hiding Place, relates an incident which taught her this *first step* principle of giving thanks in every circumstance. She and her sister, Betsy, had just been transferred to the worst German prison camp they had seen yet, Ravensbruck. Upon entering the barracks, they found them extremely overcrowded and flea-infested. Their Scripture reading that morning in was 1 Thessalonians, and had reminded them to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances. Betsy told Corrie to stop and thank the Lord for every detail of their new living quarters. Corrie at first flatly refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted. She finally succumbed. During the months spent at that camp, they were surprised to find how openly they could hold Bible study and prayer meetings without guard interference. It was several months later when they learned that the guards would not enter the barracks because of the fleas.

~Bible Illustrator; Parson's Technology

"Cicero, the great Roman orator and philosopher, said, "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue but the parent of all other virtues." Perhaps that explains the large part gratitude plays in Paul's letters. He begins with thanksgiving when he writes to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Thessalonians!:

~Ibid

Paul wrote again and again of this *first step*!

Bible commentator Matthew Henry, knew the importance of *first step*; after being robbed, he wrote this in his diary:

"Let me be thankful...
* first because I was never robbed before.
* second, because although they took my wallet they did not take my life.
* third, because although they took my all, it was not much.
* fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Our Scripture Text says

"Giving thanks in *every* circumstance..."

every = "...every kind or variety...." ~Vine's

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Back when Rudyard Kipling was England's most popular writer, the news got out that his publishers paid him a dollar a word for his work. Some Cambridge students, hearing this, cabled Kipling one dollar, along with instructions, "Please send us one of your very best words."

Kipling replied with a one-word telegram, "Thanks."

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God hasn't given us a "skunk coat"

but a robe of righteousness,
made white in the blood of the Lamb!
And He requires not only our respect, out also our thanks!
"In every kind or variety of circumstance, give thanks!"

Conclusion: Responsive Reading Pg.27