



Thank You Notes

Part 4 – Thank You God for Making All Things New

Shay Robbins

We're excited to be back. We're diving back into our 1 Thessalonians series titled *Thank You Notes*. Today we are picking up in Chapter 4 and the title of this message is *Thank You God for Making All Things New*.

My wife and I are coming off maybe the all-time best Thanksgiving. Because of the generosity of a close friend who has a bunch of frequent flier miles, he made it possible for Ashley and I to go on our first vacation apart from the kids since before she was pregnant with Lulu. We got to spend the first part of Thanksgiving down in Cancun at an all-inclusive resort and it was amazing. Praise God. We are so thankful for that. Then we came back and were picked up at the Little Rock Airport by my in-laws and we spent the next three nights and four days in a three-bedroom home with 13 in-laws and a 37-year-old bachelor sleeping on the couch in the living room. It was like the heart of the home. We had an absolute blast this; it was hilarious. We made it home this weekend and we are so grateful just to be home and to be with you here today.

It's been a busy couple of weeks and if you wouldn't mind, I need to catch up on some of my thank you notes.

Thank you, Herschend Family Entertainment, for tearing down our roller coaster and helping us, as parents, to teach our children that theme parks and churches are two different things.

That's seriously confusing, right? We drive by White Water and my kids are like "We want to go to church there." There are probably 14 people here right who came for brunch with Yakov. Surprise, surprise.

Thank you, Ted Cunningham, for making me feel so athletic and powerful and physically gifted.

I run everything by Ted and he got a good kick out of that. I thought it could go either way, but it went well.

Thank you, couch, after the big Thanksgiving meal, for giving me a big "There, there; it's going to be alright."

Thank you, Thanksgiving, for bringing all of our favorite things together: family, good food, and the Detroit Lions?

Random... How did they get that contract.

Thank you, Cracker Barrel, now that Thanksgiving is over, you can help me get ready for Easter.

Thank you to the phrase "I need to loosen up the old belt buckle" for once referring to a pilgrim with a big head.

They wore them on their head to keep their hat on, I guess.

That's thank you notes. We appreciate you, R.P. You are good, buddy, and the consummate professional.

As I said, we are jumping into 1 Thessalonians 4; get out your Bibles or your electronic devices and we will take a look at the scriptures together. As you know, Paul, Timothy, and Silas came through Thessalonica on their second missionary journey. While they were there, there was a powerful movement of God and many people came to faith. As a result, the religious leaders of the day chased Paul and his friend out of town. Paul, having a pastoral heart for his church, is nervous. Obviously, he is anxious about how they are doing. He sends Timothy from Athens back down to Thessalonica to see how they are doing. They meet back up in Corinth and Paul finally finds out that they are doing excellent. The Thessalonian church is really growing in the faith and everything that Timothy had to say was good news.

Paul sits down as a pastoral father and he writes them an encouraging letter to continue to put fuel on the fire of their newfound faith and encourage them to excel still more. In Chapter 4, there are four major subjects that Paul addresses. The major theme that goes through the four of those is love, the first one being a true sexual love, the second one a true brotherly love, the third a true love for those who are outside of the faith, and then finally, a true love for Christ and for our eternal home with him. That last one is truly the underpinning for all of the proceeding points.

A True Sexual Love

We are going to jump in and we are going to move quickly throughout the entire chapter and kind of focus on each one of those four points, beginning with a true sexual love. We pick up our text in Verse 1.

1 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Paul is affirming that they are really doing well in their faith. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified... Sanctification is a work that means being set apart. As they walked away from an old lifestyle and began to follow Jesus, as they took on the belief system of Jesus, their thoughts, their minds, their words, and their actions began to change and as a result, they were set apart from the culture that they were living in.

That is how all of our lives, as Christians, are supposed to look. As we walk with Jesus more and more throughout the years, we should be sanctified and set apart more and more with each day that passes.

He gives them the charge. **...that you should avoid sexual immorality...** Immorality is a big term. It's talking about everything that is sexually improper. **4 ...that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable...** Paul is talking specifically about their individual, physical bodies and their minds as well. **5 ...not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.**

I kind of skipped over the main point. Katie, if you would pull up the big idea of the morning, it's this:

God makes all things new and His truth exposes worldly norms as counterfeits.

Many of you may know that when someone is trained to identify counterfeit bills, rather than actually studying all of the false bills, they will look at the real thing. They will study that real thing intently, learning all of the watermarks and the stamps and the way that the shading is on the president's face and how the bill reacts in light and different things like that. They study that bill to the extent that they get so familiar with it that when they are out and interacting with bills and there is a counterfeit bills is put in front of them, they will immediately know that the bill is false, not real.

As a teacher, what Paul is doing here is rather than focusing on everything that is incorrect or outside of this new faith, he is focusing on the real thing. That way, as they learn what the real thing is, a true sexual love, they will know that everything that lies outside of that is improper, wrong, sin.

This morning, we are going to look at God's word and what God's word has to say about a proper or a true sexual love. We will first look at Genesis 2: 24. In the second chapter of the Bible, God comes out and establishes marriage. **That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.** We immediately see in God's word what a marriage is supposed to look like: one man and one woman, male and female, leave their families, and come together and they become one flesh, husband and wife. That is the core or the place where our sexuality as human beings is healthy and correct.

We go to Hebrews 13: 4 and it builds off that. **Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.** So that marriage bed where true healthy sexuality takes place or is exercised... Anything outside of that marriage bed... The writer of Hebrews is saying the marriage bed is to be undefiled and anything outside of that is incorrect, impure.

Then Jesus takes our bar of understanding and he ratchets it up in Matthew 5. He says **27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** This applies to both men and women. It is a principle. He's saying that the physical body... We know what adultery is. It's any sexuality outside of the marriage bed. He says that it's not just the physical body, but also what takes

place in your mind. Jesus raises the bar. He says that if you look at a man or a woman and you lust for them sexually, you're committing adultery in your heart. Again, he's really narrowing down our understanding of what true sexual love is in the context of the Bible. For those of us who are followers of Jesus, this is our baseline, this is our understanding of our sexuality.

What's interesting is in Verse 8 of 1 Thessalonians it says ***& Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*** Many times when you speak truth or you stand for what you believe in, you're going to receive persecution or disagreement, maybe even hatred, and the reality that we need to understand as believers is that hatred is misdirected. Really, it's not a rebellion against my laws for everybody else's life, but rather it is a rebellion against God himself for what he is calling mankind to walk in, which is obedience.

I'm the perfect guy to be up here addressing this and I'm the perfect guy because I made a huge mess of my life in the sexual arena. There was a long stretch of my life where I walked away from the faith and pursued everything that felt good, looked good, and tasted good. When I had a man that began to pursue me and share faith with me, I got to the point where I was so fed up with this lifestyle that I had been living. I tried everything else and I came to a point in my life where I decided, "I'm ready to follow you, Jesus, no matter what it takes or what it means for me. I know it's going to be radical, but I'm ready to take this leap of faith."

One night in confession, I shared this and received the grace of God. I received forgiveness. In this new faith in Jesus, I had to make some decisions about how I was going to live out my sexuality from that point forward. With a heart to honor God and to do it his way according to a true biblical sexual love, I made a couple hard decisions with God's help. One of the decisions that I made was that I was not going to kiss another woman until it was my wife standing on the altar. That's not ***the*** way to do it, but that was the way that God asked me to do it. The reason I believe he asked me to do that is because every other kiss had led to a place that I shouldn't have gone. So I made that hard stand physically. I made a second stand, which I think was actually much more difficult than the physical stand. It was an emotional stand. The emotional stance was that I was not going to tell another woman "I love you" until I had asked this woman or my wife-to-be to marry me. I made these decisions well before I ever met Ashley and I walked in a lot of grace and forgiveness in that. God strengthened me and gave me the power to fulfill that.

When Ashley and I started dating, we didn't kiss and it was very difficult. We also didn't say "I love you." We would always say "I like you." As I fell in like with her, that word like just lost its power and its meaning because there was so much more welling up behind my heart for her. I knew it was the right thing to do; God had called me to go above and beyond to protect her heart.

When we first started dating, I shared with Ashley kind of generically. It was like "Here's kind of where I've come from, this is my sexual history," but it was very general. She was gracious and forgiving and decided that she wasn't going to dump me on the spot. When we got engaged, we began to walk through a very difficult time. It was difficult for this reason. I was forgiven for that sexual sin in my past. I had dealt with that and I was living in grace and forgiveness. But the consequence of my sin continued

to follow me. Sadly, I had to take that and, in greater detail, sit it down before my bride-to-be so that she could deal with it.

God, in his graciousness and his extravagant love for me, gave me a woman who wasn't perfect, but as far as worldly standards go, she was as pure as the driven snow. I had to sit there and watch my wife wrestle with the mess I had made with my past. For those of you who are not married, I'll just tell you it was absolutely brutal. But because Ashley has a strong faith in the Lord and she is gracious and forgiving, she walked through that process in her own time and she got to the point where she was able to forgive me and to let go of that past. As a result, through God's grace, she has never, not once wrestled with jealousy, or brought it up in the heat of a fight. It has never affected our marriage bed. It is only by God's grace that we've been blessed to walk through that. I think I stand here before those of you who aren't yet married to encourage you to fight for your purity, knowing that one day it will be a beautiful gift that you get to give either your husband or your wife.

As I share that with you, I think there is one more thing that I want you to hear. I have a little illustration up here. The scripture talks about us learning how to possess our own vessel. There is a lie out there and it's predominant. The lie is this: The best you can hope to do is just manage your sexuality, your sexual addictions, your sexual imperfections. I want to make it clear that that is a lie. That is a demonic lie and the truth is that Jesus came to set us free and to live in victory. The way that we do that is that we shine light into every nook and cranny of our life.

I was looking for pictures of houses that were totally lit up or totally illuminated. I found this guy sitting in his living room. He probably lives in Taney County; don't you think? There is not a square inch of his house that isn't illuminated, and so it ought to be for those of us who have a desire to walk in purity and in victory in our sexual lives. We should expose every part of our life to God's truth and God's people to keep us accountable.

So in the physical, it would be with a friend or with your spouse, letting them know at all times of the day where you are. They should know what's on your phone. They should check your text messages and know who you are communicating with. If the computer at home is a stumbling block, you take it out, break it on the steps, and get rid of it.

Then in your internal life – in your heart and in your mind – you take God's word and you begin to saturate your mind, and as God's word filters through your mind, it will eventually become part of the belief system in your heart, out of which you will act and speak. If there is ever any hidden sin or any corners of your heart that have not been exposed, that hasn't been confessed, that you're too scared to tell anybody because it's so gruesome... If you are harboring darkness, the only way to find your victory is to shine light into that darkness. When you live in the full illumination of Christ and brotherly love, 100% total victory is available to you.

I want to share this with you and I want to make sure that everybody knows that I take no credit for this and the reason I share it is because I just want to dispel the lie. I went from a sexual addict to living in 100% sexual victory for the last nine years, and it's only by the grace of God. The reason I tell you is that

I want you to know it is possible. There are faithful men and women in here that have been walking in that victory four or five times longer than I have.

A True Brotherly Love

I thank God for true brotherly love. We pick up in 1 Thessalonians 4. ***9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more...*** So the Thessalonians were growing in their faith and their relationship within their godly community. Paul is saying, "I want to encourage you; I want to exhort you to excel still more to press further into those relationships to shine light into the darkness by surrounding yourself with godly community."

For those of you who have been here for 10 or 11 years now, from the time Woodland Hills was holding church in a movie theater, you've gotten to see how our church has matured over the years. It's almost like a child growing up in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.

Two weeks ago, I sat down with Ted and asked him "What do you feel like the next step in maturation is for Woodland Hills?"

Without even thinking about it, he said, "We absolutely know that the area we need to grow in is community."

Community is so important. Paul explains it in Ephesians 4. He says if you're going to grow in your faith, the way that you do that is in the context of community. We talked about the accountability piece where people can see all the angles of your life, but also when you're in a tight-knit community, God has passed out spiritual gifts, resources, kindness, and availability to build up the body of Christ that we might grow in our faith.

As a church, we want to challenge and exhort those of you that haven't gotten involved in a tight-knit community to grow in that way. I think when you sit in a large church like this that has two different services and meets in the chapel, you're probably thinking to yourself that it's so big that it's difficult to get connected and that's true. But when we look at the model in Acts 2, we find out that there is a gospel movement in Jerusalem and right before this – I think it's in Verse 41 – it says that 3,000 souls had been added to the church. So we are talking about a church that is much bigger than Woodland Hills, but this is the model of this large church and it was this found in Acts 2: 42. ***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*** It's really a simple equation. If you go on to read Act 2, you find out that the people were selling their possessions and then giving to those who were in need. They were taking care of each other. Somehow, amongst these thousands of people, there was tight-knit, real-life biblical community taking place and it was causing the growth of that biblical community.

When my wife and I got married, we started a small group and we were in that small group for seven years. We disbanded in a healthy way, but in that group, we have one couple that is written into our will

to help take care of our kids. We have an older couple that was instrumental in my faith and helping me grow up as a man, a husband, and a daddy. That little community had a huge role in our life.

Since then, the last couple of years, we started a small group with four couples that live within our neighborhood. This group... While we are far from perfect, I don't know that we are the model, but as I've sat back and looked at our relationships, I realize we really have a powerful community. We all travel and we have a horrible time even just getting together for our Bible studies and stuff, but when I sat back and thought about what our community was like... Every Wednesday, all of our wives bring the kids over and they have a play date together. There's a widow that lives right next door to us. The guys have been working together to keep her lawn mowed. She has terminal cancer and through the encouragement of our group, one of the guys, just a couple of days ago, sat down with her and got to share the faith with her and to pray with her in her final days.

We throw a party in our neighborhood annually in hopes of getting to know all of our neighbors and to build relationships there. We share stuff. We share mowers, blowers, eggs, and sugar. Whenever there is a hardship, we know that we can count on those people. We can count on them when we have hardship, but also when there is joy. When is something to celebrate, like a new birth, we get to rally around and celebrate those things together. I think about Matt and Katie Gumm right now who have finally, after six year, gotten pregnant and their community is rallying around them. We are just celebrating with them for this long awesome journey as we begin to pray over that precious little one in Katie's belly.

I want to challenge us as a church body. If you want to grow in your faith, if you want to be more connected, a tight-knit, small group community is the next step. It's not necessarily easy. You're going to have to expose yourself; you're going to have to open yourself up. We have church staff that are willing to help you, but it might take a couple of groups before you find one that you really have chemistry with and you really enjoy. You might need to start one yourself with your group of friends who just hasn't intentionally connected yet. If you're an older couple and you have wisdom to give, you need to round up some young couples and bring them underneath your wing and create that community so that we can continue to grow and be strengthened in our faith together.

A True Love for Those Outside the Faith

We pick up in Verses 11 and 12. ***11 ...and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.***

This is really interesting. When Paul is addressing the true, real-life pursuit of outsiders of the faith, he is saying this is what it should look like. He didn't point out how you reach out to them or how you talk to them or how you evangelize them. He's saying you need to live a life that is attractive, responsible, hard-working, that frees you up to give and to be available. I think one of the great challenges we face in our culture is that we're so busy. Soccer matches and traveling are chewing up our time. After school events and financial pressures and scoring the next big deal... We are stretched so much that it makes us unavailable to people to be there to love them and to care for them.

I just took some basic notes to kind of get your mind churning as you process through your own life towards outsiders. Dave Ramsey, who I am a financial student of, says "Live like no one else so you can live like no one else." He's for responsible living and fighting off debt. With a heart of simplicity and availability, I want to challenge us as a church body to choose some things in your life that you are going to be loyal to regardless of their performance towards you. For me, that's my wife and my family and my kiddos, my church, my friendships, and my job. Regardless of how they perform, there's a small group of people that I'm going to be committed to, that I'm going to be loyal to no matter what.

Here's the deal. Within our church body, don't expect to know everybody, but fight to know 20 people really well. As you know those 20 people really well, you'll still have margins to reach out to those who are outside the faith. Set a budget. Pay off your debt. Live within your means. Be generous. I think we miss so many opportunities to bless people outside the faith because we are living loosely in our lives.

Be kind and be a blessing. Last week, Dick Foth used a quote that I thought was gold. He said, "Kindness is the currency of heaven." When Paul writes to the Romans, he says that God's kindness is what leads people to repentance.

The Robbins family has 11 family values. It's eleven because Ashley and I couldn't agree on six, so we just piled them in. We have these 11 family values and each morning at breakfast, when we kind of get our act together, we walk through just one of them with the kids. One of the Robbins' family values is "Be kind, be a blessing." What's so fun as we've watched our kids and as we've talked about this idea or this power of being able to be a blessing, they are starting to realize, even as little ones, that their words have power to lift up or to tear down. So as we practice being a blessing, it's become a weapon in our arsenal and they are really growing in it.

When we were in Cancun, we were at an all-inclusive resort. I would say almost everybody that we saw would wake up and start drinking first thing in the morning and then they would just get sauced up all day long. The Robbins' family, in their sobriety, were just able to engage with the folks that were serving with us. It was so fun. We didn't necessarily go out of our way; they were going out of their way for us to serve us. Because we weren't so consumed with taking from them, we just began to kind of build some friendships. As we built friendships and talked and laughed and asked them about their lives, we found ourselves in some really amazing conversations.

When I travel, I always pray and ask God to give us opportunities and the courage and boldness to have gospel conversations. We got to have one of those conversations with a young guy named Marco. Marco is 25 years old and he is kind of like in the programs team, all the entertainment. We had the opportunity to share with him. It was like he was sucking the gospel out of us. We weren't pushing anything, but because we were available to him and I think just kind, he began asking these questions. We got to walk him all the way through the gospel, all the way through our personal testimonies.

What was so neat was as he shared about his openness to hear, he told us that he had a friend. There were five friends and one of their lifelong buddies was a Christian. He was the only Christian growing up in Chihuahua, Mexico with this group of boys. All those guys... They even talked about him behind his

back. They knew that they could always count on him. And because of his kindness, Marco was open to the gospel. That kindness had peeled open his heart and we were able to be one of those seeds that were planted in his heart that, prayerfully, one day, will take root and he'll become a follower of Christ. I really believe it was because one man, who God planted in his life, lived in kindness towards him.

A True Love for Christ and Our Eternal Home with Him

We pick up in Verse 13. ***13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.***

As we are talking about these counterfeit belief systems in regards to death, there are all kinds of counterfeit. There are those that believe that if you live a good enough life, you'll be reincarnated and come back as a higher creature. There are those that believe that if you kill a bunch of innocent people and die in the process, you will be guaranteed inheritance in heaven. There are those who have no hope that believe that they live this life and when they die, it's over, so during this lifetime, they are going to get theirs. So when hardship comes, these people are stuck wrestling without hope. Paul is saying you need to understand that you as believers, as you walk through the trials and the hardships of life, you have hope because this life does not end here. There is a better place, a home waiting for you. So we live with this hope and even joy as we walk through trials.

If any of you guys have ever been in a race, you know that when you run a race, it's going to be hard. There are going to be grueling moments. Your muscles are going to be searing, you're going to want to quit, but you know that the finish line is coming. For those who are in Christ, as they run this race, and it will be tough, difficult times will come, but as we run this race and we do it in biblical community, you're going to have believers alongside you who are cheering you on and encouraging you, "Keep going; you can make it. The finish line is worth it. Finish strong." We get to run with the hope that those outside the faith don't understand. This true love for Christ and this understanding of what happens when we die is the underpinning of all other loves.

As Paul writes, he explains this. When you die and your physical body is buried, your soul goes to be with God in heaven. There is a day coming where you'll be caught up... In the Greek, it's the *rapturo* or the *rapture*. When Jesus comes back and he calls all those who are in Christ, those dead in Christ to come up and be with him... Those who are living still are caught up in the heaven with him. It's a promise that one day Jesus is coming back and he's taking us home with him.

I read a story recently; I feel like it kind of wraps this message up well. The story is told by an author named Richard Burr. He tells the story about this godly woman named Miss Bender who was a

missionary for 40 years. In her late 80s, she put herself into a nursing home. Richard's mother was friends with Miss Bender, and through that mutual connection, Richard met with this woman. He sits down with Miss Bender and begins to ask her about her life. As she is telling him about her life, she is just rejoicing that she is in this nursing home; she is just praising God about it. He's thinking to himself that she must be losing her mind. As he described her, she weighed about 75 pounds soaking wet and was limited to a wheelchair.

Miss Bender just kept going on and on about how thankful she was and how she praised God that he placed her here in this nursing home in her final days. She went on to describe how planes fly in a holding pattern over an airport. As she is describing this, Richard couldn't see where she was going and just really thought this woman was losing her mind. But, as she continued to explain, she said in an airport with one runway, the planes have to wait to land one at a time. The other planes that are up in the air will have to circle around in these holding patterns, each waiting their turn. She said, "Each person in this nursing home is a plane that is going to land, and either they are going to land their plane in heaven or they are going to land their plane in hell. I thank God that I'm here in this holding pattern before they land their plane." Low and behold, Richard explains that of the 81 people who were in this nursing home, she had led 31 ladies to Christ and was discipling them.

You better believe that Miss Bender was sanctified. She lived a life that was set apart. She knew true love. She knew a brotherly love. She was building community within her nursing home in her last days. She knew a true love for those who are outside the faith, thanking a praising God for this opportunity to be circling in this holding pattern. Finally, she had a solid foundation and a love for Christ, knowing that this place was not her home. Her plane was going to land and when it landed, it was going to be in heaven with Jesus.

Today, church, I want to challenge you that you would take Paul's exhortations and apply them to your life that we as a church body would excel still more.

I want to close out with some thank you notes. My heart behind these is that they might be some application for us as we walk away, and that they would orientate us towards who we need to be thankful for and the kind of people we need to become.

Thank you to the husbands, wives, parents, and friends for being an usher of God's grace and forgiveness daily.

Thank you to those who both challenge and encourage you to live in the light.

Thank you to the one who reminds you that the best is yet to come.

Thank you, care ministry volunteers, for serving our church family and those who mourn.

Thank you, GriefShare leaders, for helping widows through difficult times.

Thank you, God, for making all things new.

Brothers and sisters, would you pray with me? Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for today. I thank you, God, for the truth and the power of your word. I pray, Jesus, that counterfeit messages would evaporate from the presence of truth. I want to ask, Jesus, that your Holy Spirit would come in powerful conviction that we would walk away changed, further sanctified.

I pray for those, God, that don't have a relationship with you and are on the outside that this would be made clear to them today, but it would also be made clear that you long to have a relationship with them.

I pray these things in the name of Jesus... Amen.