

A Christmas Story: Dealing with Discouragement

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

1. The sermon for this week featured a scene where Ralphie doesn't get Santa Claus to agree to give him a BB Gun for Christmas. Share a time when you did not get a Christmas gift you asked for.
2. Talk about a time when you were disappointed by something that didn't go the way you had hoped. Perhaps a prayer that wasn't answered the way you wanted or a dream you had that wasn't fulfilled. Why is disappointment such a painful experience for many people?
3. While God is not a "Divine Santa Claus," we are often encouraged in the Bible to pray in faith, believing that God will grant us our requests and answer our prayers. But sometimes, the answer is "no." What reasons do you think God would have for denying a prayer request from someone who is sincere in his/her faith?
4. Pastor Mark suggests that we should remember how often God answers our prayers with a "yes" rather than a "no." Why do we sometimes forget how often God blesses our lives and gives us what we ask?
5. When we don't get what we ask for in prayer, Pastor Mark suggests we bring our disappointment and anger to God, rather than use it as a reason to reject God. Why is this difficult to do?
6. Have you ever been angry with God? How did you handle that anger?
7. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Pastor Mark suggests that one of the best ways to respond to disappointment is to praise God. This seems counterintuitive, because we don't feel like praising God. Why is it helpful to praise God even when we don't feel like it?
8. What's the difference between giving thanks "for" your circumstances and giving thanks "in" your circumstances? Why is that distinction important?

9. How does praise change our perspective on our disappointment?
10. Pastor Mark describes two types of faith: “Because of” Faith and “Regardless of” Faith. What is the difference between these two types of faith and why is “Regardless of” Faith the type of faith that pleases God the most?
11. How does the birth of Jesus remind us that even in a world where there is disappointment, God is still worth trusting?