



[Leader: Tell a story about a time you received a gift and weren't very excited about it. Below, my story is provided as an example.]

Being a dad is one of the greatest joys of my life. I love my three daughters, and I am excited to see what God is going to do with them as they grow up. But for those of you who have young siblings or can remember being a little kid, there's one universally true thing. Little kids give terrible gifts.

I'm not saying it's not super sweet or thoughtful, but let's be real. That macaroni necklace is not going to sell on Etsy. The little finger painting that they do in class is not going to win any awards. And whatever it is they've done with that dried out Play-Doh, honestly, I can't even recognize what animal they were trying to make.

One year for my birthday, I could tell everybody was just busy. It's all right. We live in a busy season at our house with three kids under 10 years old. And I've learned to accept that, as the father, my birthday is going to be a little lackluster. But this year, it was even more so. For my birthday, I received one drawing that was done in a regular pen and had no color on it whatsoever. I also received a popsicle stick with a face on it wrapped in another plain piece of paper. And for my cake, I was gifted vanilla cupcakes with chocolate frosting. On top, there was half an Oreo. That might sound alright to you, but if it's not chocolate on chocolate with chocolate, then it's not my birthday cake.

It just all kind of felt underwhelming.

[End your story here.]

Have you ever felt like somebody could have stepped it up a little bit in your direction? Maybe you were like me, and you didn't get anything fantastic for your birthday or Christmas or whatever special occasion that was going on. Maybe you worked hard on a project, and nobody said anything or recognized your efforts. Or perhaps you feel like instead of being a blessing to people, most people kind of find you annoying.

It's hard to live life being bitter. But some of us that have gotten good at it. We remember every time somebody let us down or didn't meet our expectations. We hold those experiences in our minds, and we don't let them go. We also don't let that person live them down. Maybe when their birthday comes around instead of spending some money on them like we usually would, instead, we regift the macaroni necklace.

But is this how we would want other people to treat us? What if we got busy or distracted and forgot that our best friend's birthday was coming up? What if we didn't have the money that we wanted so that we could get our parents an excellent gift for Mother's or Father's Day? What if we simply forgot that a particular event was coming up and didn't give it the thought that we should have?

Would we want someone to be bitter in our direction if we didn't intend to do them harm?

Or, if we're truthful, are we sometimes bitter about our circumstances? Maybe we don't have the number of friends we think we deserve. Or perhaps our followers on social media aren't quite where we'd like them to be. Maybe our family isn't as functional as we'd hoped, or our school isn't the one that will get us into the next level of education.

When we're bitter about our circumstances, sometimes we get so focused on ourselves that we can begin to blame God.

It's easy to wrap our minds around ourselves. It's harder to think of other people all the time, but we kind of hope other people are thinking of us. We might think God has given someone else an easier path in life, while our own seems harsh.

I think that's why Paul, the guy who wrote the letter we're about to read, really wanted to encourage the people who lived in Thessalonica to make sure that they were different; to live in such a way that would be a blessing to others and put their focus where it belonged. Let's read this passage and see what he had to say.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 [CSB]**

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