

Eternal Investment: Get the Body In Motion
Making Our Thanksgiving Thanks-living

Colossians 3:15-17
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Do you feel blessed this morning? Okay, I realize that feelings can be deceiving. Let me ask it another way: Do you *know* you are blessed? Can you look around you and, seeing those sitting next to you, recognize that God has blessed you today? If so, how do you respond? I hope you can find the words to express your thankfulness to God.

Human nature is both mystifying and frustrating some times. We can see the “bad” so easily and yet often miss the “good” that is right under our noses! I mean, it is easy to find someone willing to share their troubles, but often difficult to find someone quick to declare their gratitude. Unfortunately, this often carries over into how we talk with God. While our prayer “requests” are often very specific, our praises can tend to be a little too general.

Perhaps we need to be more like children in this respect. I can remember our daughter Erin when she was little asking to pray for our meals. Her prayers were always “unique.” She would often use one of the prayers we had taught her when she was very young and would say something like this: “God is great, God is good; Now we thank Him for our...” At this point she would often pause, look over what was on the table, and conclude her prayer by saying something like, “for our chicken!” She didn’t want to speak in generalities. She wanted to be specific in her thanksgiving!

It is good at this time of year to be reminded that we should give thanks – specific thanks – that include more than just a few well chosen words. In fact, sometimes we can express specific thanks without even *saying* anything. Look with me at Paul’s words in Colossians 3:15-17.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Did you catch what verse 17 tells us? “And whatever you *do*, whether in word *or deed*, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We have been talking this month about being good stewards and how we can make eternal investments by giving to the church through both our financial giving and our participation in various ministries. Here, in Colossians 3, we are

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reminded that our *attitude* in giving should be one of thankfulness. In his writing, Paul makes it clear, though, that he is not talking about a “momentary lapse of thankfulness.” He is saying that our behavior – our *consistent* behavior – should result from what is in our hearts. He refers to the “peace of Christ” *ruling* in our hearts and the word of Christ *dwelling* in us. The result is that we are changed from the inside out.

To LIVE Thankfully, We Must Have a Thankful Heart.

Attitude can be steered by our thinking and our will, but attitude originates or “springs” from our heart. One of the major “killers” today is heart disease. I am not talking about hardening of the arteries or the organ pumping in your chest. I am talking about the spiritual heart that abides in each of us. I am talking about the center of our being that determines our attitudes and, ultimately, our actions. If our hearts are hardened and turned away from God, then we suffer from a disease that will ultimately kill us *unless* we turn to God and let Him do a “spiritual heart transplant.” *This* is a choice that each of us must make.

Let me share a true story with you about two men who exemplify what I’m talking about. One was named Andy and the other, Lee. Andy was born with only one eye and without any arms or legs. His parents could not deal with their son’s condition and so, they abandoned Andy, leaving him at the hospital. For ten years, Andy was shuffled from one hospital or institution to another. Most people would have understood if he would have simply given up, but he didn’t. In fact, everyone was amazed at Andy’s determination. Whenever he was told he couldn’t do something, he would find someone else to help him find a way to do it.

Over the years, Andy sought out ways to “normalize” his life. He was willing to try new technology and, after many years of pain, experimentation, and hard work, Andy’s determination paid off. With the assistance of special equipment, Andy was able to drive a car. He attended and graduated from college. He became an accomplished music composer. Andy’s life was truly a heart-warming success story. Lee’s was not.

Lee was born to a mother who was too caught up in her own problems to ever really show any love to her son. Left to “raise himself” more or less, Lee headed down a destructive road. He developed an “entitlement” attitude and, when things didn’t go as he thought they should, Lee would quickly give up. He dropped out of high school during his junior year. He found a way to join the Marines, but his poor attitude led to worse behavior and Lee was court marshaled and given a

dishonorable discharge.

Feeling he was mistreated by the Marines, Lee left the country and married a woman in his adopted nation. Their marriage was rocky and, after moving back to the U.S., soon disintegrated. By this time, Lee felt inferior, misunderstood, angry and hopeless. So, one day in November of 1963, Lee took a rifle with him to the Texas School Book Depository building in Dallas, Texas and from an upper window, he shot and killed president John F. Kennedy.

What a contrast we see in these two men. Both of them began life at a disadvantage, but while one gave to life, the other took a life. One was grateful for the little he had to work with and sought to improve his life; the other did not seem to have a grateful bone in his body! One saw his “handicaps” and decided to develop his potential; the other saw his “handicaps” and chose to play the “blame game,” making excuses for his bad decisions and the equally bad results.

Oh, but I forgot the most important difference between these two men. One decided to put his faith in Jesus Christ and allow God to change his heart; the other denied the very existence of God and sneered at those who claimed to be Christians. His heart remained hard and, as far as we know, he died without ever turning to the one Who could have given him a new heart.

Some would look at these two men and say it was a matter of fate. I don't buy it. We all make decisions, including choosing the state of our hearts by choosing how we will respond to God. That decision then ultimately helps determine our attitude. *Choosing our attitude* comes down to a question of our dependence. *Who do we depend on?* If we depend solely on ourselves, we will find ourselves in a constant battle because of our natural bent toward evil. That is why we are so quick to turn to the negative. But if we depend on Christ, trusting Him to guide and change us from the inside out, then we are much more likely to develop an attitude of gratitude. If we develop this attitude of gratitude, *then we are likely to live thankfully!*

There is a saying: “Impression without expression leads to depression.” Another way of saying it is that we *need* to express what is inside our hearts. It is not enough to just have a good attitude. We need to *do* something to express that attitude. You could say it this way.

To Be *Thankful*, We Must Live It!

Paul spoke to this in Colossians 3:17 when he indicated that we should let everything we *do* be an expression of praise. There are many examples of this in the Bible. One of the examples that has always stood out to me is the story of the widow and her offering. Look at this story with me as it is

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recorded in Mark 12:41-44.

⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

I am sure that some who may have seen her that day – as well as some who read about it today – think that the widow was being irresponsible. Here she was living from hand to mouth and she was giving away the little she did have. What sense does that make? But Jesus saw that it made total sense. He recognized that she was giving from a grateful heart. He saw what she did as a true act of faith, believing that God would take care of her if she would simply trust Him. She was living out her thankfulness.

Another example of someone demonstrating their thankfulness is found in Luke 7:36-50.

³⁶Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

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⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This woman came in and basically worshipped at Jesus' feet. The perfume she poured on Jesus' feet has been estimated to be worth a year's wages. But, she didn't care. Many watching her only saw the way she used the expensive perfume that day and totally missed the rest of her offering to the Lord. She offered him her thanks and her love. The cost did not matter to her. Nothing would have been too high of a price to show her gratitude to Jesus.

The Pharisee that had invited Jesus to his home that day didn't get it. He was an extremely religious person, but he was too focused on being religious to be grateful or even respectful to Jesus. Gratitude did not seem to flow from his heart, but judgment certainly did. This is a common symptom of being "religious" without having a true relationship with the Lord. It is easy to "look" religious yet still harbor a hard heart from which an attitude of gratitude cannot come.

Obviously, if we want to be like Christ, then we want to develop an attitude more like that demonstrated by the widow or the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume. If we want live thankfully, how do we go about putting it into practice?

Start with an *"attitude check."* When I went to church camp as a teen, the counselors would randomly call out, "Attitude check," to which the campers would reply, "Praise the Lord!" It is not a bad idea for us to occasionally do an attitude check ourselves. Ask yourself three simple questions on a regular basis. First, *are you thankful to God?* This initial question can serve as a reminder, but we shouldn't stop here. Also ask yourself if you are really *expressing an "attitude of gratitude."* If so, *how* are you expressing your gratitude to God? After reflecting on this, then ask what you can *specifically* do to express thankfulness to God.

There is a verse that we read earlier that can serve to remind you to live thankfully. Commit Colossians 3:17 to memory: *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Repeat this verse to yourself regularly and let it become engrained in your mind and your heart. Then, *do* what the verse says to do. Live in a way that everything you do can be done in the name of the Lord and be an offering of thanksgiving to Him.

How's your attitude today? Are you grateful to the Lord? How are you expressing it? As a church, let's "get the Body in motion" and make our thanksgiving **thanks-living!**