

DEVELOPING A THANKFUL HEART - "Lesson 1"

We're entering a season when we are prompted to reconsider the prospect of giving thanks. Our theme verse is **Colossians 3:15** which says, **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."** The center section indicates that this is the responsibility of every member of Christ's church. Not that I want to alter God's word one iota, but focus on memorizing just the beginning and ending phrases. Ready? **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be thankful."** Again? Now let's personalize it. **"Let the peace of Christ rule in my heart...and make me thankful."**

Having recently taught the book of Colossians, I was impressed again by the concepts in this passage. The idea is that we are to **let Christ's peace "officiate"** _ to **"referee"** if you will, in our hearts. If anything in our hearts is **"out of bounds" (both hands pointed to one side)** with an attitude of gratitude, we are to reign it in. If the Spirit of Christ **"blows the whistle"** on **"discontent"**, we're to **"send it to the sidelines."** If He **"throws a flag"** on **"worry"** for **"holding" (hold wrist with fist clenched in front of chest)** we need to **"bench it."** Why? Because the truth is that worry will almost always **"blitz"** thankful hearts.

Pay close attention to David's words in **Psalms 139:23-24**: **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."** Herein, perhaps lies some simple 1st steps needed for developing a thankful heart. Let's examine each one carefully.

ASK GOD TO DO A HEART CHECK. How else should we interpret **"Search me, O God, and know my heart"**? Yet, notice I didn't say that we should do a personal diagnosis_ or even get a professional opinion. Too often we let incompetent people give us counsel. Isaiah tells us the Lord's standards are much higher than ours. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. We need to turn the process over to God. He may find we're **"underinflated"** _ but more often than not, we tend to have over- inflation issues. (*Patriots illustration*) We think we're in better spiritual health than we really are. He not only judges our symptoms (*our actions*), but He knows the cause. In **Jeremiah 17:9-10** we read: **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."**

Think a moment. What prevents you from being thankful? If **"resentment"** should **"encroach"** on our territory, Christ may **"stop the play"**_ but it's up to us to always be ready to **"defend the line of scrimmage."** So often we aren't happy with our position in life, and our hearts are muddied by jealousy and envy. It has been said that our disappointments are but God's appointments. We are where we are for the time-being because God's having us play this position. And if we aren't grateful for what we have where we are, we'll likely not be happy with what someone else if we were they are.

FOLLOW GOD'S SIGNALS. The phrase **"lead me in the way everlasting"** implies we need guidance. The road to peace and gratitude isn't as easy to find as we might think. **Proverbs 21:2** says **"A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart."** (*James Marshal of Vikings illustration*) My personal experience is that I sometimes let little things upset me. Don't get me wrong, they seem huge at the time. My frustration leads to anger and that anger not only crowds out my gratitude, it causes me to display discontent in less than godly ways. Yet, if Christ calls a **"personal foul"** for **"unnecessary roughness"**, or **"unsportsmanlike conduct"** (T) I'm to **"throw it out of the game."** Bitterness has no place on the field_ at least if we have any hope of reaching our goal. And don't expect a heart to be filled with thankfulness if it's already occupied with greed, either. That's too many players downfield.

Take a close look at the verses that immediately follow our theme verse. First, **Colossians 3:16** says, **“Let 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.”** I think we often miss Christ’s guidance, because *we don’t understand His signals*. There are close to fifty signals a referee may give on the field_ and to be honest, I wouldn’t have recognized a third of them. The Lord Jesus has a lot more signals than that. The only way to recognize them is to get acquainted with His word_ and I don’t just mean memorizing passages. We need to let His teachings dwell within us_ influencing our every decision.

Which leads me to the final point. **Colossians 3:17** says, **“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.”** Catch that? I know when we are corrected for bad attitudes, we might respond with *“whatever”* – but that’s the point. Whatever we say or do is to be according to Christ’s call. How are we ever going to do have any confidence that what we’re saying and doing has His blessing if we don’t know His will for us? We’re not. But, if we pay close attention to Him, letting Him officiate in all we do, we’ll find our hearts gravitating more and more toward gratitude.