

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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WEEK ONE: A LIFE OF GRATITUDE

Colossians 3:1-17

November 13, 2022

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This week's sermon has two points. To live a life of gratitude, you must:

- Think about the right things.
- Get rid of the wrong things.

INTRODUCTION: A life of gratitude goes beyond simply saying “thank you” to others or even to God. A thankful heart originates from a thankful life. To demonstrate true thanksgiving, we must have the proper attitude, but unfortunately this does not come easy or naturally for many of us.

So, for the next two weeks, we are going to dig into Colossians 3:1-17 to learn more about how we can foster a thankful spirit. Each week, we will begin by reading this entire passage. Then we will explore the verses in more detail to discover how to live a more thankful life.

First, a little background... Colossians was a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Colosse. Colosse was a city in Asia Minor. If you found Athens, Greece on a map and moved your finger east, across the Aegean Sea, past Ephesus, you would hit Colosse. Paul wrote the letter while in prison in Rome, around the year of AD 60.

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:1-17

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you

once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ 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.

At first glance, the bulk of these verses seem to have little to do with gratitude. However, I want you to look at this passage as if it is a recipe. When we follow Paul's recipe, the result is a thankful heart and a life of gratitude.

1-THINK ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:1-2

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

EXPLANATION: The New Living translation says "set your hearts on the realities of Heaven." It's important to note that in the Bible, the term "heaven" can refer to one of three meanings. "Heaven" can refer to our atmosphere, what we typically think of as the sky. It can also refer to outer space, or it can refer to the home of God. Obviously, in this context, Paul is advising us to think about things related to Heaven, the home of God.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever heard the saying that some people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good? This statement is often used when people act religious but fail to exhibit Christ-like characteristics.

For example:

- A woman carries her Bible everywhere and is quick to quote scripture but is also the first to judge and never shows compassion, or
- A man attends church every time the doors are open but will not lift a finger to help a person in need, or
- The pastor uses fancy words and boasts about his theological knowledge but is unconcerned about whether his congregation understands what he is saying.

Is that the kind of heavenly-mindedness that Paul is referring to? I do not think so. Certainly, it's important to know God's Word, but setting our minds on things above is more than just memorizing scripture or listening to sermons. It's about what really matters to us.

In other words, what matters to us should be the same things that matter to God. Our perspective should be a Godly perspective, not an earthly perspective, an eternal perspective, not a temporal one.

In Hebrews 11, the author lists men and women of great faith.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:13-16

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

- Those believers followed God even when their earthly lives did not work out the way they anticipated.
- They followed God even when their circumstances were difficult.
- They followed God even when it appeared that God had not kept his promises.

Why? Because they set their hearts and minds on things above.

Philippians 4:8 gives us a good way to test our thoughts. It says, “*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*”

APPLICATION: If you want to know if your thoughts are about things above, ask yourself if they are true, noble, right, pure, or lovely? Is what you are thinking about admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy? If so, then you are on the right track. These types of thoughts help us to rely upon Christ for present help and give us hope for a future in heaven with Him thereby helping us to live life with more gratitude.

As we look at life through the eyes of God, we should begin to seek what He wants. We can learn to live with more of an eternal perspective and be more content with what we have been given. A life of gratitude begins with setting your hearts and minds on things above.

ILLUSTRATION: A long time ago, a book caught my eye and I bought it. It was entitled, “Don’t Sweat The Small Stuff” and it had 100 short chapters with helpful information and tips about everyday life. It was written by Richard Carlson who wrote several best-sellers, I believe. The last chapter of his book is entitled, “Live This Day as if It Were Your Last. It May Be.”

Carlson started the 100th chapter asking, “When are you going to die? In fifty years, twenty, ten, five, today? Last time I checked, no one had told me.” He wrote: “I often wonder, when listening to the news, did the person who died in the auto accident on his way home from work remember to tell his family how much he loved them?” I hope Carlson followed his own words because he did at the age of 45 of a pulmonary embolism while traveling, leaving behind a wife and two teenage daughters.

It is not my intention to be a downer with a story like that but to point out that life is precious, it is short, and it will end soon enough. A life of gratitude IS the life you want to have. I’ve talked with scores of people in the final days of their lives. Many of those people have accepted the fact that they are doing to die and have let go of stressors. They aren’t really worried about much. As they reflect on their lives, they are grateful for everything. At times, I’ve wondered if I’m talking with the person that was really meant to be. Don’t wait until your final days before are filled with gratitude.

- Think about the right things

2-GET RID OF THE WRONG THINGS

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:3-8

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

EXPLANATION: Sin hinders a life of gratitude. Many sins are an expression of discontentment. Many other sins are consequences of being discontent. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust and evil desires are a result of not being content with God's definition of sexual purity and marriage. Greed is not being content with what we have. Anger and rage are often a result of not being satisfied with the way in which something is being handled or a certain circumstance. Slander, dirty language, and lying exhibit an unwillingness to communicate in way that is pleasing to God. Each of these sins is a result of not being content with the type of life that God wants us to live. In fact, sin in itself originates with a discontentment with God. So, Paul tells us to put these things to death, to get rid of these sins.

ILLUSTRATION: Here's a true story I want to share with you. When I tell it, you'll think I should be telling it to a younger audience but bear with me and you'll understand why I am telling it to mostly adults. Tonya wanted a game for Christmas, not just any game. She wanted a specific game. She made sure to let her parents know. She added the game to her wish list. She mentioned it several times, but on Christmas morning, the game was not under the tree. There were a lot of other really nice presents, but the one thing that Tonya really wanted was not there. She was angry, and she let it show. She pouted. She sulked. She stomped around the living room and refused to express interest in any of her other gifts. Her parents noticed and were understandably disappointed in her behavior, but they offered no explanation as to why Tonya did not receive her coveted request. Hours later, Tonya's grandmother came to celebrate the day with the family. She brought armloads of gifts for Tonya and her siblings. Among Tonya's presents was the

game she so desperately wanted. Tonya was a Christian, and although she was young, she immediately felt convicted. She understood how sinful her actions had been, and the lesson resonated with her well into adulthood.

APPLICATION: Here's why I told you that story, because many times, our reactions are like that child. Many times, we pray for something, and we expect it to be packaged a certain way. When God answers our prayer a different way it's easy to become just like Tonya, walking around pouting like spoiled children, thinking that God only partially heard our request, or did not understand it. Later we understand why he answered the way he did, and we realize our pettiness was uncalled for and unjustified.

Obviously, this is not God's plan for us and not God's best for us. He wants us to get rid of these sins and to find contentment in Him and His Word. And interestingly enough, while contentment leads to gratitude, gratitude actually can help us be more content. The more intentionally thankful we are, the more unlikely it will be that we will be discontent. When we begin to think about and thank God for what we have, we are less likely to complain about what we do not have. To live a life of gratitude we need to:

- Think about the right things.
- Get rid of the wrong things.

ILLUSTRATION: Miss Hettie is a member of this church and in a rest home now. Hettie has had lots of negative things happen to her. She's grieved numerous losses, but she has remained a person of gratitude. Now in a rest home with her memory failing, she does not know who I am but she wants me to stand there while she tells me all the things she's thankful for.

INVITATION: 1 Timothy 6:6 says, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" The holiday season in America is an especially dangerous time when it comes to contentment. The world wants us to believe that we need more stuff to be happy. God wants us to be thankful with what he has given. As we head into the holiday season, let's make a conscience decision to be intentional about thanksgiving. The altar is open if you need to ask God for help in thinking about the right things or getting rid of the wrong.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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