

Sermon for Sunday, August 11, 2024

Colossians 3:14-17

Matthew 6:5-8

The Deep Life of Overflow: Love God with all of your Spirit.

How do we "love God with all of our spirit?" To begin I would say that this is something serious followers of Jesus work on all of their lives. But how? Let's use the passage from Colossians to inform how we might love God with all of our spirit.

It would be far too easy to give you a laundry list of big concepts and then tell you to simply "go and do." Instead let's use the Bible, look for Jesus stories (plus one example from the apostle Paul) and allow his example to inform our thoughts and inspire us.

There are five points that come out of the Colossians passage. From those points I will share readings—mostly from the gospels that support and inform how we can love God. These examples should help us grasp ways wherein we can love God with all of our spirit.

1. The passage from Colossians 3:14 opens with the words, "clothe yourselves with love". Is there a story that demonstrates Jesus acting with love? Yes, many. But John 11, *the raising of Lazarus* is especially good because the word love is included several times. The story opens as Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha ask Jesus to come saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Two verses later we are told, "Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," And finally, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" The story makes it abundantly clear that Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary, & Martha. He was "clothed with love" for them. Our challenge then is to clothe ourselves with love as Jesus did. But as is often the case, this scene is far more complex than my brief description suggests. Jesus made a conscious choice to return to Bethany. It is the raising of Lazarus from the dead that forces the religious authorities to seek to arrest and kill Jesus. If he had stayed away (up in Galilee) he would have avoided not just arrest, but death by crucifixion. Are we willing to so totally clothe ourselves with love as Jesus did?

2. The next bit of guidance from Colossians says, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." How can we accomplish this, especially in turbulent times? Romans 5:1-2 says "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." We are justified by faith. We are justified by the redeeming actions of our Lord, Jesus the Christ. Jesus has done the work. Jesus has accomplished for us that which we are not and never have been able to accomplish for ourselves: our salvation. We can stand before God because of Jesus. For that reason we have peace. We have nothing to fear. And when the fear dissipates, peace fills the gaps in our heart.

3. Verse 15 goes on to say, "be thankful." Is there an example of Jesus expressing thanks? At the institution of the Lord's Supper in Luke 22:14-20 Jesus says a table prayer that includes giving thanks. The Scripture says, "When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and *after giving thanks* he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and *when he had given thanks*, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." I suspect that saying thanks to God as a table prayer was something that happened at every meal. Give thanks, always and in all circumstances. Habits of gratitude open us up to recognizing the multitude of gifts we are being given by God. It's easy to stop recognizing that everything we've been given is from God. We start to think that we've earned this or that; or that we deserve this or that. But all is gift from God our creator; the one who loves us. In all circumstances *give thanks*.

4. When we are immersed in the high drama of Holy Week it is easy for us to overlook one little detail in the passion narrative as told in Mark 14. In verse 26 "When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." *When they had sung the hymn*. The Passover meal began with a prayer of thanks and ended with singing. Singing is just so natural for so many of us today. We sing when we are happy. We sing when we are full of sorrow. We sing out of a spirit of joy and/or thankfulness. Singing is a way for us to express the full range of our

emotions. That's why Paul advises that *with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God*. This past Thursday I led worship at Cannon Rivers Assisted Living, including the Memory Care unit. One of the memory care residents really did not appear to be engaged in the worship service, and did not hold the worship folder in her hand much less repeat anything I said. However, when I started to sing the first verse of *This is My Father's World* she chimed in and sang with me to the end. Music and singing was a way for her to communicate and give thanks and praise to God. Sometimes this is why we sing.

5. Finally Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. There is a story of Jesus in Mark 9:38-41 that says, "John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us."

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus: yes. But be wise. When you are stepping out into a new venture, be sure to think it through and spend time in prayer. Take your time. Be patient and allow God to set up your circumstances. During the waiting, pray, often. Have questions? Talk to trusted people to make sure that you've considered all your options. Think about unintended consequences. Pray.

As a representative of our Lord Jesus, you don't want to sully his name or reputation by doing something that makes him look bad. You want to be clothed with love, maintain the peace of Christ in your heart and be thankful. If your life is a manifestation of these characteristics then you will be a good representative of Jesus.

Ultimately, then your entire mode of being, your life will evolve into one that demonstrates that you are loving God with all of your spirit: all of your being. To be clear; it is God's Holy Spirit who causes the change. If we rely exclusively on our own attempts we will most surely fail. But God's Spirit can shape our hearts and minds into ones that are clothed with love, filled with peace, and always thankful.