

## Three of ONE – Spiritual focus is the product of the thankful heart

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us”(Php 3:17).

The answers to life’s greatest questions do not lie within you! While that may be contrary to the vast majority of thinking out there, it is nonetheless true. As so many writers in the Bible have said, though using very different language from one another, “It is not for man to guide his own way of life, but the steps of the spiritually focused or God-centered man are order by the Lord.” In similar fashion, as we become students of His we also enter into spiritual apprenticeship under those who follow Christ and walk before us. We follow men like Paul and Peter and our own contemporary spiritual leaders who strive to walk in the way of Christ.

This being said there is an idea here that must surface if we are to ever gain insight and wisdom not only from Christ, but from the leaders about us. We must be thankful. We must be willing, from the depths of our body and souls be willing to see and appreciate all that has been done for us on a spiritual level and rejoice. Some have simply termed this endeavor “counting our many blessings” and it is exercise that prods its way into our hearts and fosters an open spiritual pathway by which we may be influenced for good. Do you remember the lepers that Christ once healed? You may recalled that he healed ten, but only one came back to thank Him. One thing that we often miss about this teaching is the simple fact that the practice of appreciation or blessing counting always leads us back to Christ or opens our hearts to his instruction. If we do not appreciate what he does then we remained closed off to his teaching or at least don’t feel its real significance.

Notice what Paul says in Colossians 1:11. “May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” If you eliminate the subordinate phrases, he says, “May you be strengthened with all power...giving thanks to the Father.” Giving thanks gives us power – the power to be spiritual focused.

Appreciation, however, is not always easy to come by. Many things in life battle for our attention and seek to distract us from fully understanding and acknowledging just what the Lord and others have done to help us, thus cutting us off from spiritual growth. By far the biggest culprit here is pride. When we just can’t see outside of self or just can’t seem to acknowledge others or see ourselves as “#1,” then we cannot possibly appreciate others. “In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’” (Psa 10:4). An over-inflated view of self is one simple step away from atheism.

Second, a poor self-image, which is at the opposite end of the spectrum from pride, can cut off a sense of appreciation. We may think, “How could God care about me? I am too lowly and feeble and untalented and...” God thinks otherwise. Read Psalm 139. In the midst of this great song about how well God knows us, the writer says, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” In other

words, when man has a healthy sense of self he not only appreciates God, but is open to Him. As the song ends, the writer says, "Search me and know my heart."

Third, failed connections can account for many of the greatest spiritual failures we have witnessed in our lives. On a recent fishing trip with some dear friends I was amazed at how we could navigate the open seas without a landmark in sight using only a global positioning system to connect us to a spot on the ocean floor where we were almost guaranteed to find fish. Modern technology is great and many people benefit from it and see the need for it, but it does beg a question. Why is it that we can see such a great need to have these modern marvels like gps, Facebook, Twitter, email, and others to keep us connected to our friends and family and even destinations and still fail to see the need to have any method of continually appreciating and connecting with God? Of course we do have a tool for such. It is called the church. To appreciate the church is to appreciate Christ for it is his body. If we fail to connect to and appreciate the church then we will fail to appreciate and connect with Him and thus remain aloof in our spiritual focus.

So what does appreciation look like? Well, I think simple appreciation is the best appreciation. If each of us were to simply take a few moments as we began each day and, as we have already mentioned, counted each blessing, then it would have a profound impact on how the rest of our day would go. This, of course, would include not just the things that we have, but certainly those that we do not. As someone once said, "Let us give thanks – if only for all the bad things that are never going to happen." Both of these you will notice in Psalm 136, where God not only blessed His people by granting them blessing, but also by keeping them from evil things.

### **One Assignment**

Today you will be given a card that you are encouraged to carry with you all week long. On this card is a scripture reference. Each day you are asked to read this scripture and then record the things that you are thankful for in that day. Try to be specific as possible. For instance, do not simply say, "God, Christ, family and friends." Instead, mention the specific things about each of these you are thankful for. Once you have done this, offer a prayer to God to show your appreciation. Each day you should try to stress different items you are thankful for. Do not simply repeat the list from day one for day two. Challenge yourself to dig deep and really think about all the ways that God has blessed you. An appreciative heart is a happy heart and a happy heart is an open and spiritually focused heart.