

THE MARINES DO IT TOO

Colossians 3:16-17

I want to begin with some audience participation. Can you supply what comes next after the following words? “If everybody had an ocean across the USA, then everybody’d be...” The answer is “surfin’ like California.” Those lyrics come from *Surfin’ USA*, a song recorded by the Beach Boys 50 years ago. Here’s one that might be a little tougher. “You never close your eyes anymore when I kiss your lips and there’s no tenderness in your fingertips. You’re trying hard not to show it, but baby I know it...” According to the Righteous Brothers, “you’ve lost that lovin’ feeling.”

Isn’t it astounding that we can remember the words of these songs over decades? You might say that’s because these are classic songs, but my guess is you can also finish this line, “Gimme a break, gimme a break, break me off a piece of that...” Of course that’s an appeal for a piece of a Kit Kat Bar. We even know the words to commercial jingles. That tells us that songs can have a powerful effect on us, for their message gets planted in our brains and can stay there for decades.

In his book, *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller made the claim that all of us have the desire to be new, better. I believe he is right. The desire to be renewed into someone better beats strong in all of our hearts. We know our shortcomings and weaknesses, and we want better. Just the word “transformed” is appealing. It is this desire that is behind all the shows on television about extreme makeovers. We love to see the obese person changed into a healthy, svelte person, we love to see the dowdy person on *What Not To Wear* transformed from the ugly duckling to the beautiful swan, we even like to see homes, restaurants and hotels given a new and beautiful life. The appeal of all of those shows is that we dream of it happening to us. It is a letdown when we watch one of those shows and the ugly duckling is only changed into a not quite so ugly duckling because we dream of better for ourselves.

That is one of the many reasons why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerfully appealing. In his grace God says in Christ we can be renewed, transformed. We can be changed into something more beautiful than we were. The gospel promises that this is our certain destiny in Christ. It says our renewal begins the moment we put our faith in Jesus. There is a change that begins immediately, but that process will only be complete when we are in the presence of Christ. The section of the book of Colossians that we are in is about living out this new life we’ve been given. In other words, it is about the way this transformation process happens. We have seen that part of this new way of living includes us being unified in Christ and living in a way that protects and promotes that unity. That involves having compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, love and living with peace in our hearts. In these next few sentences of the book Paul gives us some instruction that is critical to us being transformed. Many will find the message of these verses somewhat

surprising when they understand what they are really saying. Let's look at Colossians 3:16-17 and learn more about this transformation process. I guarantee you some of it is going to surprise you. You might even find it a bit weird and uncomfortable. It won't be what you expect. It ties in to the idea that I began with having to do with the songs we remember. Let's see what Paul says.

We are transformed:

BY BEING INFUSED WITH THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST

Have you noticed how snooty restaurants have become? It seems like everything on the menu has to involve a reduction, an infusion or a fusion of cuisines. Why does everything now have to be artisan? I've encountered artisan hamburgers, artisan macaroni and cheese and artisan tacos. I have no doubt McDonald's will soon be offering a McArtisan sandwich. And don't even get me started on quinoa.

Desiring to be relevant I want to talk about an infusion. Only this has nothing to do with food. I refer to a spiritual infusion. If we want to be renewed, oh wait, I've got a more current way to say that, if we want to have an artisan life, there needs to be an infusion. Paul says, "Let the message of Christ dwell richly in you." We need to let the message of Christ infuse us. It needs to spread and become present in every part of our being. Our thoughts, our words, our priorities, our moral commitments, our hobbies, our activities, our entertainment, our work, our financial decisions, our relationships, all of it needs to be infused with the message of Christ. To infuse something means to saturate it. Paul says our lives need to be permeated and saturated with the word of Christ.

The earlier version of the NIV translated verse 16, "let the Word of Christ" live in us. Many pastors will talk about the Bible because it is the Word of God, so they equate what Paul says here with the Bible. Thus the message is that we need to saturate our lives with the Bible so that it infuses every part of our being. I have taught that myself. However, while that is an important idea I don't believe that's quite what Paul meant here. When he wrote these words the Bible as we know it didn't exist. Most of it had been written, but it hadn't been fully completed and it had not been collected. Therefore it is unlikely that's what Paul had in mind when he wrote this. The Colossians certainly would not have understood that to be Paul's meaning because they had little of the Bible available and many couldn't read. So the new version is correct. The word Paul used was the Greek word *logos*. It had a wide range of meanings. It started with the idea of speech, and I think that root gives us the right idea here thus it is the message of Christ that must permeate us.

What is the message of Jesus? It was a revolutionary message that says there is one God who is righteous, just, good and trustworthy, unlike the supposed pagan gods who were capricious at best. This God is also a God of love and grace who cared so much about people he entered the world to save us. A profound part of that message is that we are

unworthy of this God's approval, thus we are doomed to judgment. But this God took our judgment on himself so that he now offers us the gift of his acceptance, love and his eternal life, and our part is to accept the gift by faith. Therefore we have hope, we have connection with God, we are accepted purely through what God, here as Jesus Christ, did for us. Now we can have his Spirit in us living through us reproducing the character of Jesus in us.

That message is different from any other message. It is truly life giving and transforming. For those in Colossae who had put their faith in Jesus it was brand new and it was revolutionary. It absolutely changed everything about how they saw the world, how they saw themselves, what they believed to be right and wrong, about how they should live. It was all different, and all better.

To have that message infuse us is to have our lives filled with peace, with joy over what God has done for us, with gratitude no matter what else may happen, to have God be present with us in everything we do, to have our lives shaped by love and grace. It is to desire in every situation is to do what Jesus wants us to do. If that infuses our lives we are going to truly have artisan lives. We all want the message of Jesus to infuse us and transform us so that we have artisan lives. So what steps can we take to foster that process?

WE ARE INFUSED BY SINGING TO EACH OTHER

Notice that verse 16 says we teach and admonish one another through the songs we sing to each other. It is easy to miss that. We can easily focus on the teaching part and sort of skip over the fact that we do that through singing. The older NIV translation said we should "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." That sounds like we are to do two different things: teach and sing. However, the word "and" was not in the original text. So the newer NIV corrected that. A literal translation of verse 16 reads, "Let the word of Christ live in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and reminding one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs with grace singing with your hearts to God." That means we teach and remind each other of the message by our singing to each other! That's how we are infused with the message of Christ.

This same message shows up in Ephesians 5:19 where Paul wrote, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord." There he said we speak to one another by singing! It's the same idea. Don't miss this. God is telling us the way we infuse the message of Christ in our hearts is by singing to each other!

I know some people who say they don't like the part of church where we sing together. Perhaps they don't have good voices or they just feel awkward doing it. It's just not their thing. This is more often true of men than women. If you're in that camp I've got some bad

news for you. In this passage God commands you to get over it and start singing. That might seem kind of weird to some people, but this actually says something important to us.

The usual approach to this passage is to say that we should all have a “quiet time” in which we get alone with God, read the Bible and pray. That is how we get the message of Christ in our lives and this discipline will be perhaps the largest factor in determining how our spiritual life goes. But we’ve already seen that can’t be correct for that would not have been possible for Paul’s Colossian readers.

Given that the Colossians could not have their “quiet time” and study the Bible, if that is the key to spiritual growth as some say today were those early Christians spiritually impoverished? Were they not infused with the message of Christ and thus failed to have artisan lives? That seems at odds with history for many of those early believers were dramatically alive in Christ, they were vibrant and astoundingly mature and firm in their faith, and in fact God used them to change the world. How was that possible if they were not able to carry out the discipline it is assumed today to be key to growth?

The current idea that the key to spiritual maturity and growth is getting alone with the Bible and praying, actually is influenced by a couple of cultural factors. One is that our society heavily believes in individualism. We view ourselves all as free agents, living our lives on our own. Thus the stress in the spiritual realm is one’s individual, personal relationship with God. We think that relationship can be lived out almost without the involvement of other people. So we find Christians who live as though they have no need of other believers and find the church uninteresting or irrelevant.

A second factor is we are a written word culture that also heavily emphasizes knowledge. This is a knowledge society. So we can easily have a tendency to stress reading the written word and gaining more and more knowledge. We tend to be quite intellectually oriented, especially in our area where college education is practically a given. With those realities it is obvious why it is so often taught that the key to an artisan life is having one’s own private “quiet time.”

Don’t misunderstand what I am saying here. This is not an either/or thing. We have an incredible blessing, a real privilege, to have God’s Word abundantly available to us in written form. We should individually spend time reading and meditating on it. It is a huge plus. But what Paul said here is something entirely different. He is saying the way we infuse our lives with the gospel of Christ is by communicating it to each other through singing together!

Oh, that can’t be right, can it? Look, I’m just telling you what the Bible says. If you disagree, take it up with the book’s Author. The Bible says repeatedly that there is

something powerful that the Spirit does in the lives of people when they gather corporately and minister to each other, and particularly when they encourage each other in song. Look up how often we are commanded to sing in the Psalms. Note particularly Psalm 108:3, which says to the Lord, “I will sing of you *among the peoples*.” We are to sing together. Psalm 149:1 commands us, “Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise *in the assembly of the saints*.” We are to sing the praises of our Lord together. I have had many dealings with Christians who are long time believers, who are strong in their faith, but who have never understood this. That has an impact on them. It produces a skewed spirit and faith.

Well that just seems weird. Why singing? I don’t get it. There are several reasons why Paul made a big deal about this. The first has to do with planting the message of Christ in our hearts. Remember my earlier introduction. There are songs whose words we can remember 50 years after we first heard them. That is astounding. What’s even more astounding is often we never tried to learn them. They somehow are just there in our minds.

I’ve shared this little incident before. Last fall Laurie and I were on vacation. One evening we were walking along the main street in the town we were staying in. It was a beautiful, warm evening. We walked by an open air restaurant that has live music every night and out on the street you could clearly here the guy who was playing the guitar and singing. As we neared the restaurant he was singing the Kenny Loggins classic, *Danny’s Song*. Some of the words are, “even though we ain’t got money, I’m so in love with you honey and every thing’s gonna be all right.” That song is 40 years old, but everyone we passed on the street, young and old, and there were a lot of them, was singing along. They knew the words. I’ll bet they’re like me. I never set out to memorize those words, yet I know them. Does that suggest anything to you?

How was God going to infuse people with the message of grace in Jesus Christ when they couldn’t read it? Yes, he had people teach it to them, people like the apostles, prophets and later on teachers and elders. That was good, but the way he would cement it in their hearts so that it was there as they fought through the stress, the chaos and tumult of daily life was by having them make up songs about the message, and then singing those songs over and over so that music became a part of them. When the music became a part of them, the message became a part of them. It infused them, it saturated their hearts.

Well, yes, but we live in a different culture. We have the written word so doesn’t that change the equation? It changes it some, but not totally. Let me ask you a question: do you think God is sovereign? That’s a loaded question. Obviously I believe he is. If God is sovereign, could he have chosen to have Jesus come at any time in history? Clearly yes. Could he have had him come after the invention of the printing press so that people could have had the written word? Clearly again, yes. What does that tell you? It tells me that

having the written word is not the crucial element in our walk with God. Unless God made a mistake and didn't realize it until much later I don't see how else you could interpret that. Which suggests to me that God knew what he was doing, and that his strategy of having people meet together and sing his message to each other from the very beginning of the church was purposeful. In other words that is the critical element of people having the message of Christ in their hearts. Thus it is as crucial to us today as it was in the first century.

Part of the reason that singing together is so important is that we can remember it. Do you have any verses from the Bible that you once memorized but can't remember now? Of course, we all do. So God has made it easier for us by having us sing his truth because it plants in our minds and hearts more easily. But there is another aspect to it. Music touches our hearts, even our emotions, in a powerful way. God doesn't just want his message in our brains, he wants it in our hearts. I have had a few occasions in my life when I've heard a talk that touched my emotions, but I've had many more occasions when singing a song touched my heart in a powerful way. I've had many occasions when a song brought strength and comfort in dark times.

In his book, *The Hope Of Glory*, Sam Storms wrote, "Singing enables the soul to express deeply felt emotions that mere speaking cannot. Singing channels our spiritual energy in a way that nothing else can. Singing evokes an intensity of mind and spirit. It opens the door to ideas, feelings, and affections that otherwise might have remained forever imprisoned in the depths of one's heart...Singing sensitizes. It softens the soul to hear God's voice and quickens the will to obey."

Think about how you want to be loved. Do you want someone to love you in a sort of rote, paint-by-the-numbers fashion, doing all the right things that are required? Or do you want to be loved with passion? I suspect you want someone to love you passionately, with all their heart. Does it surprise you that God wants the same thing? What is the greatest commandment? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. God doesn't want an intellectual, bloodless faith that checks all the boxes. He wants all of us, mind, will and emotions. And music is a powerful way to stir up all of our hearts.

You may be thinking, "Uh, yeah, I've heard this a lot from Al Menconi. Actually what I'm saying is in line with Al's message, but it's not exactly the same. The key here is that it is essential not just to listen to spiritual music, but to actively sing it to each other. I'll illustrate why. Laurie and I were surprised when Carissa told us that her husband, Michael, our terrific son-in-law, sings a lot with his fellow Marine pilots. It is a part of what the Marines do. Does that surprise you? It caught me off guard.

These guys are Marine officers. They are impressive men, highly intelligent, exceedingly skilled, highly accomplished, and in all cases just as tough as nails. They are combat trained. Before they ever fly an airplane they are trained to lead a rifle platoon in combat, if it should ever be necessary. They are qualified marksmen. They have survived rigorous training, including SERE, the brutal survival school all pilots must go through. They've been trained and prepared to survive a helicopter crash in the ocean, repeatedly being dropped blindfolded into the water while strapped into a helicopter upside down and have to find their way out. They fly supersonic combat aircraft. And they sing a lot.

What does singing have to do with being a combat pilot of a supersonic jet? Is this just some tradition? No, there's actually a point to it. It is a critical point. The Marines are trying to mold them together as a fighting unit. So they have them sing because when they sing they have to forget about themselves, not worry about how they sound or how they might look, and do their part to accomplish the goal of the whole unit. In other words, in a way that is awkward and difficult for many, even potentially humiliating, they have to give themselves up for the good of the whole. It teaches them that you never, ever leave your wing man. It is not the content of their songs which contributes to unity and accomplishing their goal, it is the act of singing together itself.

Do you see the point? As we come together and sing to each other we must forget about ourselves. And that is one of the fundamental principles of the message of Christ that God wants to infuse our hearts and lives. Jesus gave up himself to bring about our good, and now he calls on us to do the same thing. He calls on us to give up our selfish obsession and serve him by serving others. One visible and potentially embarrassing way we do that is by forgetting about how we look or sound so we can encourage and strengthen our brothers and sisters in our songs.

I have heard people say, "I get more out of being alone with God in nature and I feel closer to God there than I ever do being in church. I just don't get much out of church." I can understand that, and there is some truth in that for many people. However, it can have a deadly flaw, one of the worst a Christian can have. That view is all about self. It is all about what I feel and what I "get out of" something. It is good to feel close to God through nature or some other personal means, but that's not enough to produce an artisan life.

First of all, worship is not about us, it is about God. And God is honored when people gather in his name to praise him. Second, we are called to encourage, remind, and build up one another. We are to help others experience God, especially in song. You cannot do that if you are not with them and not singing with them!

Imagine a brother in Christ who has been going through a terrible time. He has lost his job and been out of work for months, and no matter how much he prays he has no encouraging

leads. Then his refrigerator dies and his car's transmission goes out. He is struggling to trust God but then he gets even worse news. He is told that one of his kids might have some serious physical condition. He is discouraged and he is deeply concerned about his child. He needs help. He goes to church at the end of the worst week of his life wondering where God is. It feels like God has abandoned him. He gets to church and only 3 people are there, one of whom is the pastor and another the pastor's wife.

Everybody else had to go to their kids' sports tournaments, or they had out of town guests who don't go to church, or they had to work on that project on the house, or they just felt like sleeping in and didn't make that day. How does our struggling brother feel? He feels alone and more discouraged than ever. What he needed was to be with brothers and sisters who would care about him, and sing with him, "when I'm found in the desert place, though I walk through the wilderness, blessed be your name. On the road marked with suffering though there's pain in the offering, blessed be your name."

For sure we should use all means to infuse our hearts and lives with the message of Christ. We should avail ourselves of hearing from God through his word. But let us never forget the power of gathering together and singing of the grace and greatness of our God. These verses say that this is an essential, irreplaceable part of the process of being transformed by infusing our lives with the message of Christ.

WE ARE INFUSED BY LIVING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

Michael and Carissa are going to take a vacation in the Caribbean next month. They looked for some specific things in planning their trip. One of them was they wanted to go to an all-inclusive resort. They pay one fee and it includes not just their hotel accommodations, but their food and all activities as well. I bring that up because verse 17 is an all-inclusive verse. The artisan life that is created by the infusion of the message of Christ is all inclusive. It starts with the words, "whatever you do."

Here we get to another aspect of infusing our lives with the message of Christ. Everything you do in your life is included in this instruction. As you go to school you are to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. As you do your work, you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. As you vacuum the carpet you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Whatever you eat and drink, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Whenever you open your mouth and speak, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you listen to music or go to a movie, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. If you play golf, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. As you raise your children, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. In his commentary on Colossians Peter O'Brien wrote, "Everything (a Christian) does or says ought to be in light of the fact that Jesus is his Lord."

All right, but what does it mean to do something in the name of the Lord Jesus? Deuteronomy 18:22 refers to prophets who speak in the name of the Lord. In that case speaking in the name of the Lord would be representing the Lord. When David faced off against Goliath after the big man hurled his taunts at him David said in 1 Samuel 17:45 “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” In that case David was saying he came in the Lord’s strength.

To do something in the name of the Lord then is to do it representing the Lord, to do it in his strength and in his authority. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says “we are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” An ambassador speaks for his people. So we are to speak for Christ, as his representative in every situation. This is both challenging and freeing for me.

To do whatever we do is to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is to do it representing him. That means we need to ask, “Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus say this? Would Jesus use this tone of voice if he said it? Ephesians 5:1 tells us “Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children.” We are to imitate our Lord, live like him as we represent him. I suspect if we actually live in the name of the Lord Jesus we will indeed find ourselves being new and different people.

Recently one day I was in the middle of some things and feeling pressure to get them done when the doorbell rang. I answered the door and there was a young man holding a clipboard. I didn’t know him, but as soon as I saw him I knew he was selling something. He started in on his appeal and as soon as he paused to take a breath I said, “Thank you but we’re not interested.” He didn’t even bat an eye. He followed the script that went on to the next sales pitch. It bugged me a little, but not wanting to be rude I listened again, though now anxious to be rid of him and get back to my work. Again at the first chance I said, “As I said, we are not interested, thank you.” He still wasn’t even fazed by it. He just soldiered on ahead, and now I was getting really annoyed. It was now obvious that only rudeness would break through his impenetrable salesman barrier, so I quickly reviewed a menu of really rude options that would tell him to go away and leave me alone. Then the thought popped into my head, “how does Jesus want you to represent him?” I considered using his “you brood of vipers, you white washed tombs” speech that he gave to the Pharisees. He said it so it must be all right. But I suspected that wasn’t exactly what he had in mind for the occasion. So I tried to deal with the man as Jesus would, being patient and kind, yet firm. What a powerful thing it is to represent Jesus. That’s what we’re to do, and that is key to having an artisan life.

There is also a freeing aspect of this. As I do things in the name of the Lord that means I do them in his authority and his strength. That frees me up. That means it is not up to me to

have the kind of impact I would like to have or to make things turn out the way I think they should. All I need to do is represent the Lord in the situation, recognize I'm doing it on his authority, and then let his power and wisdom accomplish whatever he wants to be accomplished. I don't have to make it come out right. That's up to him. That takes a lot of pressure off.

WE ARE INFUSED BY GIVING THANKS TO GOD

Have you ever noticed how often this message appears in the Bible? Ephesians 5:20 says a life filled with the Spirit of Christ is "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." There's that all-inclusive life again. Did you notice the words "always" and "everything"?

One eminent Bible scholar said that you could sum up the Christian life in this idea, giving thanks. The motive for obeying God comes down to giving thanks for what he has done for us. The thing most capable of bringing encouragement and optimism to our hearts even when life may have a hard or negative tone to it is giving thanks to God. The reality is that no matter what is happening in our lives we always have infinite and powerful reason to give thanks to God.

Giving thanks to God is an expression of faith in him. It says we know that whatever else may happen he is still ruling over all in our lives and he is seeking our good. It is saying when that we believe he loves us, whether circumstances look that way or not. When we do not give thanks, we are doubting his character or we are selfishly ungrateful.

This passage tells us that the act of giving thanks infuses us with the message of Christ. As soon as we start giving thanks we are reminded that God is with us, that he is good, that he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that exists, that we have reason to rejoice.

Last Sunday morning early I went outside to pick up the newspaper. For you younger people a newspaper is a daily periodical that has stories carrying the news in it that gets delivered to your door. It's a thing that old people read. Anyway, it was just before the sun came up, the sky had already begun to lighten, but the light had this amazing quality to it. I can't really describe it to you except to say that the few clouds in the sky were pink and there was a sort of pinkish orange hue to everything. It was just beautiful. Birds were out and I could hear lots of them singing and chirping. I just stopped and took it all in. I had a lot on my mind. It was Sunday morning after all, and every Sunday the adrenaline is pumping and I am focused on all I have to do and say. But I stopped, just marveled at it, and began thanking God. He showers us with so much beauty and goodness that we so often take for granted. I found that my heart settled down and was full of joy, just because I had stopped to give thanks to God for a few gifts he has given all of us.

I guarantee you this, when you practice the discipline of giving thanks to God always for everything, you will find your heart and life infused with the message of Christ. It will create an artisan life in you. Fill your heart with the message of Christ by singing songs about it to each other, live every day as a representative of Jesus in everything you do, give thanks as a habit of the heart, a way of life, and you will find that you are living ...an artisan life.