



Colossians 3:16

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.

Reflection

As part of his PhD studies, a church history lecturer that I once studied under visited many of the major cemeteries and

war memorials in Europe. His interest was tombstones – the tombstones of soldiers who'd lost their lives in war. In his vast study of the epitaphs inscribed on these tombstones he wanted to know which verses of Scripture were held most dearly by the fallen men and women and their families. And what better place to look than the inscriptions on their grave stones?

Do you know what he found? He found that there were hardly any Bible verses at all. In their place, hymns. Thousands upon thousands of lines and verses from treasured hymns. And so, it should come as no surprise to us to read today in Colossians 3:16, these words from the apostle Paul,

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.

Music stays with us. It travels with us through life. Music is with us through thick and thin, celebrating with us our brightest moments, and holding our hand through our darkest hours. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, the final wishes of many of our fallen heroes and the way their mourning families chose to mark their passing was not in the words of Scripture, but in the words of songs filled so memorably with Scripture. This is how we're wired. And it's no accident that so much of the Old Testament, and many of the most memorable passages in the New Testament, in the He-

brew and Greek, are songs, hymns, and poetry. Large sections of the Old Testament were passed down orally for centuries before being written down, because you don't forget songs, and you don't get the words of poetry wrong because if you do the poems no longer rhyme. But also, because music has this way of writing itself onto our hearts and binding itself to our emotions to be accessed whenever those emotions choose to descend. And, no matter your level of education or literacy, music does not discriminate, transporting the word of God, making it accessible and memorable to people from every socio-economic background and walk of life.

Paul knows that God has made us like this. Have a look at today's verse. It begins just as we'd expect.

16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom

Just as we'd expect. Nothing new here. But then ... not at all what we'd expect.

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.

We're let the message of Christ dwell in us richly. We're to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. But how are we to do these two things?

through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Not through preaching, or bible study groups, or daily devotions on an app – but ...

through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Now obviously the place of sermons, preaching, prayer and studying the bible together and in your own private devotional time finds substantial support right throughout the Bible. But here Paul surprises us by holding up the importance of worship to the spiritual growth and unity

of Christian community. And so we have another wonderful memory verse style passage today,

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.

Teaching through song. Admonishing, gently rebuking and correcting one another through worship. Singing with your gratitude to God visible on your face. Together as the people of God. Is it any wonder at the growth in Pentecostal churches and other churches who have rediscovered the Bible's emphasis on corporate worship? It is any wonder that churches

like Hillsong are growing so quickly and also enjoying remarkable favour amongst those who are outside of the faith? Verses like today's one, and the entire book of Psalms, and memorable passages in Colossians 1 and Philippians 2, the creation accounts in their original language, and the worship orientated glimpses of heaven that we receive in the book of Revelation all point to the centrality of corporate worship in the Christian life and the innate wiring and good design of the human condition to respond to song. My little boy Ethan, he's just turned one, already moves his little head from side to side in time with music. It's only been a couple of months that he's gained some semblance of control of his body and he's already dancing. And so Paul exhorts us to use, celebrate and enjoy, how God has made us:

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.

But it is also important to acknowledge here a level of sophistication in our worship. Creating an entertainment atmosphere in which the greater part of the church service is the endless repetition of songs with superficial lyrics is not what Paul is talking about at all. And so as we consider this verse we also need to consider the type of worship music that results in the message of Christ dwelling in us richly, the type of music that saturates us in the richness of Christ; lyrics that are

sophisticated enough to teach, and rebuke; lyrics that draw upon all the wisdom of God, grounding us and growing us in the faith and used of the Spirit to make our hearts overflow with gratitude to our Father. We must be discerning; but also appropriately value, encourage and celebrate those amongst us who have these gifts. Worship like this should never be feared, no matter how conservative your background. On the contrary, Paul's teaching us to embrace the way God has made us, and to grow our churches and personal faith through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit all the while singing to God with gratitude in our hearts.

Kent Hughes points not to World War II gravestones but to church history in this respect – to Awakenings and Revivals

over the last two thousand years. Invariably, when the Word of God is recovered, it is received with great joy which is inevitably expressed in song. The medieval Latin hymns cluster around the fresh days of monastic movements. The Protestant Reformation brought a rebirth of music to the Church. The Great Awakening spearheaded by George Whitfield and John Wesley was sung to the tune of his brother Charles Wesley many great hymns. Music was an integral part of the Billy Graham crusades when he took the gospel, face-to-face, to an estimated 210 million people. During his crusades Graham would frequently use the altar call song, 'Just as I am'; hundreds of thousands came forward.

Think & Pray

No matter our theological leanings, backgrounds or persuasions it is clear from the Bible and church history that Spirit-filled participation in Christ and his Word overflows into song. The Bible teaches us that the whole of the Christian life should be viewed as worship; and yet in our corporate life together, and as the key that unlocks many of our hearts, Christian music plays a crucial roll. And so as your thought for today, consider how you feel about, and respond to, Christian worship music. Are you being taught, admonished and filled with joy and gratitude by your worship experience in church and your private listening habits? Perhaps you feel like you don't have a musical bone in your body. Is there someone you can ask to recommend Christian music to you? Perhaps

you've been convicted today of being overly critical of churches with such a focus on worship music? Or on the flipside, perhaps you've realised that the Christian music you enjoy has very little substance and are committed to finding or creating music that makes you feel the same way but also teaches, admonishes and is filled to overflowing with the riches of God's word – the type of lyrics that people will one day inscribe on their tombstones.

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you today. Spend some time singing to God with gratitude to him in your heart. And then pray over the answers to some of these questions as you're led by the Holy Spirit.