August 16/17, 2025

Seek the Things Above

Intentional Series

Colossians 3:1-4

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A lot has happened over the course of a year. I have no doubt a lot has happened in your life over the course of the past year. So a year ago, this weekend, I stood on this stage and said, “What do you hope to see over the coming year?” And so this morning, I want to ask a simple question: “Did you grow?” As you look back over the past year, did you embrace that life of a disciple—a life of growth—becoming more and more like Jesus, increasingly like Him? Did you multiply? Did you help others come to know the very grace of God that is available through Jesus Christ? Did you grow? Did you multiply with the 12 months and 8,760 hours we will never get back? Now, I have no doubt that many of us sit here right now and we look back over the past year and we say, “I have grown like crazy!” Perhaps you watched that video we just watched and you saw what was happening, but you also had memories of the very work that God was doing in you, maybe like through one of those scenes. And if that is you, I just want to say, “That's amazing, and I want to encourage you to mark that moment.” I think too often our life goes by and we don't stop and consider all the growth that God has brought about in us. Mark it! Write it down in your Bible! Make a note of it! Praise God for that!

I think there are others of us, however, who would say, “You know, a lot has happened over the past year. My circumstances have changed, but I still feel stuck. I feel stagnant. I just don't know that I grew all that much.” And if that is you, here's what I want to say. The goal this morning is not to stir up regret about that. The goal is to say, “Let's look at this year, and let's approach it differently. Let's have high hopes, high expectations for what God could do in the year to come in our lives, by His grace and by His power.” Because I believe this: I believe God wants us to expect much from Him concerning what He can do in our very lives. Too often I think it's easy to walk through our life with low expectations of what God can do in our life. And I want to say this year, “Let's not do that. Let's have high expectations!” Now, if a year from right now we are going to gather together and we're going to look back and say, “Look at all that has changed in my life,” I do believe it's important that we understand that we have a part to play. Now, it's not the most important part. It's a small part, but it is our part, and that's what we want to talk about for a few moments this morning.

So open your Bibles with me to Colossians, Chapter 3. We're going to be in verses 1-4, and let's take a look at God's Word for us. As we begin, I'm going to read the entire paragraph to give us a bit of a bird's eye view, and then we'll zoom in and look at some specifics. So this is Paul's words to his friends, his faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae. Chapter 3, verse 1:

> **Therefore if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ**

in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (*NASB, Colossians 3:1-4)

Now I am burdened this morning to help unpack the meaning of this short little paragraph. I love this passage of scripture, but I also know that Paul has a knack for packing a lot of meaning into a short passage with a small number of words. There are just 70 words here, but every word is loaded with meaning and Paul had a knack for doing that. I don't know if you caught it, but in this short little paragraph, Paul had some very important things to say to you about your life in Christ. Did you see yourself in those words? Did you see your very life? Paul outlined some things that are true for all of us that are in Christ—things that are true about our past in Him; things that are true about our present in Him; and things that will be true about our future with Him—this whole spectrum of our life with Christ.

I want to talk about those three parts of our life: Our past in Christ, our present with Christ, and our future that will be with Christ. And of course, to begin, we have to start with our past in Christ. This is something you might not be aware of. I'm going to start with verse 3, but you might not be aware that in Christ, here's what's true of you: **You have died**. Did you know that? If you're worried about death, you can worry no longer. You've gotten that taken care of. It's all done. Paul says, "**You have died**." So what does that mean? Well, what's true of each of us is that no matter what age we first came to Christ, our life before Christ was a life that was marked by doing everything on our own terms. Always and only, that was the only option we had to manage life and to muster together what we thought was a good life with what we could do in our own strength. That's our life prior to Christ, just trying to make it work. We were the kings and queens, so to speak, of our lives. And even though our kingdom or our queendom was a mess, we were very unwilling to surrender the throne, to allow anyone else to be in charge. Life was a mess. Prior to Christ, that's all there was. And that was true until God came in, and when God saved us, what He did in that moment, that blessed moment of surrender through the cross of Jesus Christ, is He took that part of us, that part of us that could only and always do everything on our own terms, and He killed it. He put it to death. **You have died**. That part of you that tries to live life on your own, that part of you that could only rebel against God, that part of you has been put to death. Before Christ, we were stuck, bound fast by sin. It's all we could do. But in Christ, we are bound no longer. You've died. Now I understand that as Christians, there is still a part of us that struggles with sin, but it's important that we understand we are no longer bound by sin. We are no longer bound to sin. That part of our life…dead! Dead, so that we might now live a new life, a new kind of life. A different kind of life is available to us, and in the chronology of our past in Christ, we started in verse 3, but now we have to go back to verse 1.

Here's the next thing that happened. You died, but verse 1: **Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ,** not only have you died…that is true…but you have also **been raised up**. You've been brought into a new life. You've been made alive. Your heart that was dead in sin has been made alive, made new to God. **You have been raised up** is his dramatic language. Now, part of what that means for us is that we can look back at our past, our past before Christ, and we can look at it and say, "The past is the past. I no longer need to live under the shame and guilt of all that came prior to my life in Christ. That has been killed. It is dead. It is done." When Jesus was on the cross, He said, "It is finished. Debt paid!" And along with the debt being paid, that former life of ours—the way in which we were enslaved to live only and always—was put to death, and now we

get to live **with Christ**, raised up with a Christ kind of life. If we were a Baptist church, someone would say, "Amen…Amen…Amen!" *(laughter)*

Paul makes this point over and over again in his letters which is the very heart of the gospel. The place that I think he says it most clearly, most concisely, is in Galatians 2, verse 20: **I have been crucified with Christ;** (You've died.) **…and it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** You've died, but **you've been raised up with Christ.** In Christ, our past is past. We have a glorious past that is a **with Christ** reality. You died; you've been raised up. Now this verse, this passage, is quite practical. It's fairly abstract but it's also very practical. Paul is saying some very practical things here, and so I want to say something quite practical.

This means two things for us. First, I think, as believers, so many of us walk around still carrying the shame of our past. What I want to say to you this morning is: That past—that part of you has died—and God no longer wants, desires, intends for you to carry around the shame of your past because He has put it to death. It's done! We don't need to wear that shame any longer. The second reality, though, that this points to is that I believe for each of us as Christians, there is still this temptation that we live day to day. We're no longer bound to live that past life, but we still are tempted to play around with it and pay attention to it, to still mess around with the old dead life. Even though it's dead, we hold on to it. And the truth of this passage means that we can let loose of our past life. We can step into the newness of life that is available to us in Christ, because that past part of us that has died, has now been raised up with Christ, which means we have a whole new kind of life…a whole new kind of life!

If you ask me, one of the things that keeps us stuck as believers is we think too little of what God can do in our life, and we think too little of the very salvation He gave to us in Christ Jesus. We think too small about it. Sometimes Bryan will say that we can't think of salvation only as having our ticket to heaven. But I think so many of us as believers, live that way. We say, "Okay, I've got my ticket. Now all life really is about is just waiting to depart, waiting for the train to leave the station." That is a meager view of salvation! Salvation is entrance into something brand new, a new present reality that certainly has a future aspect to it. But we have been set free from our old life. It has died. We've been raised up with Christ. A whole new opportunity has been made available to us. The only question is, "Will we step into what has been made available? Will we step in?"

This time of year is when everyone is going back to school. My wife and I were laughing that we get a little envious of all the school supplies our kids have. *(laughter)* I loved this time of year as a student, the year where you look forward to all you get to learn. I got my schedule when I was in college, and I was like, "Look at all I get to learn!" It's amazing! I don't think we're ever supposed to really grow out of that. God intends that we keep growing; we keep learning; we keep going deeper with Him. But certainly, it's very intentional in the lives of all the students in the room. They are forced to step into new learning.

So I was thinking about this time of year and all the college students that are coming back to campus right now, with school going to start next week for them. I started thinking back to my freshman year of college. I went to Wheaton College, which is a Christian school just outside of Chicago. Now my mom went to Wheaton, so I knew a little bit about it, but I didn't think too much

of it. The main thing that I loved about Wheaton was it was right next to Chicago. I love Chicago, so at Wheaton, I was at a campus where I could walk to a train and in 35 minutes I could be in the city…and that was what it was all about for me. I don't know what that school is like now. I haven't been there. But I know that when I was there, it was a place of incredible opportunity. My parents knew what I was stepping into. They had experienced it themselves. But when I stepped into that campus, what I stepped into and onto was a campus that was filled with people who had set their life to pursuing Christ and His Kingdom. Professors who, no matter what the class was, would try to bring a God worldview, a Christian worldview, into whatever we were learning. Students were passionate about the pursuit of Christ, thinking about what God was calling them to in the world. Worship nights, prayer nights, mission trips, special speakers would come in and unpack God's Word or help us think more deeply about Him. It was endless opportunity. Now I didn't know that at the time, and so as my parents were getting ready to leave, my dad pulled me aside and very gently—not in a condescending way, but in an encouraging way—looked at me and said, "You are stepping into a place of incredible opportunity. Don't waste it. Take advantage of all that has been made available to you. If you don't, you will be sorry." Now nothing could compromise, at that point, my enrollment as a student. I was going to graduate from Wheaton. But whether or not I was going to take advantage of the endless opportunities made available to me there, it would require something of me. It would require that I'd leave my dorm room. It required that I gather together with other students. It would require that I see: "Hey at 7pm, even though it's January and it's about negative 27 degrees, there's someone that's going to talk to us about the deep things of God," and to step into those opportunities.

You've died; you've been raised up with Christ. A brand-new life, a whole new world in Christ and with Christ, has been made available to you and to me. And because of that, as Paul continues, he focuses in on what that should mean in this present moment, the lives that we live right now. So, continuing in verse 1, he says, again, **…if you've been raised up with Christ**, (that's new life) **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God**. Keep seeking**!**

The first two things we talked about were past tense. This is present tense. This is right now. It's continuous…keep seeking. And not only that, but in the Greek language, they have something called mood. And the mood here is the imperative mood. That means that we could put it in parentheses, exclamation points! This is a command. Or if that word is too strong for you, it certainly is an exhortation. It's an urging. Paul is saying, "Don't miss it. Don't miss the light that's been made available to you. **Keep seeking the things that are above.**" The things that are above is shorthand for God and His Kingdom. **Above** isn't necessarily a location, it's more a description of the spiritual realm that is very real but invisible to us. The above things are **where Christ is.** We are citizens of an invisible kingdom, and that invisible kingdom has a king: King Jesus. He is seated at the right hand of God. He is currently reigning, although it is invisible to us right now. But that is where our hearts are to be directed towards: seeking the things of God, seeking the Kingdom of God, the reign of Jesus Christ right now. That's where we're to direct our lives. That's how what is true in the past impacts our moment right now, our today. So Paul is saying, "In light of all that's been made available, step into the life that you've been given." Don't let it pass you by. Don't settle for far too little. Expect much of God, because He has made much available to you. You live now a raised-up-with-Christ kind of life. Keep seeking the things that are above.

As he continues, he tells us one tangible way that seeking will take shape. Verse 2: **Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. Set your mind**—focus your attention. Have your thinking ***focused on the things that are above***. Isn't it interesting how often the New Testament talks about our thinking? Paul in Romans 12 says, "***Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** Where we set our mind is critically important…what we give our attention to…what we choose to dwell on. Now we have a choice here. Paul says, **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.** We can continue to dwell on things that are on the earth, the dying things, the things that were characteristics and marks of that old past life, those things that are decaying and dying and deteriorating. But we've been pulled out of the slum, so to speak, the slum of sin and shame. And Paul is saying, "Because of that, set your mind on things above, not on that old stuff." Before we came to Christ, we had no choice but to set our mind on that old stuff. But here's the opportunity that's in front of us: **Set your mind on things that are above.**

Where do you put your mind? I think my children are so tired of me talking about social media, but I'm going to keep at it, because I think it's not just true for them, it's true for all of us. Our mind is constantly being shaped…impacted…influenced. Maybe that would be a better word. There's no question that the thing that is shaping our thinking, that is prompting what we are going to dwell on more than anything else, is the media that we consume through whatever form it comes to us. Whether it's social media or just other things that we watch online or whatever, the things that our mind is set on is being impacted to a massive degree, an incredibly large degree, by what we are consuming. And so a question that all of us need to ask ourself is, "What am I setting my mind on?" Am I setting my mind on the things that are above? Am I dwelling on the rich things of God, what is good and what is beautiful, the very virtues and ways of the kingdom of God? Or am I setting my mind on things that are upon the earth, these old things that are just dying?

As Paul continues, he gets back to the first verse we talked about, verse 3. This is the grounding of our present pursuit of the things above. We're to keep seeking, and here's why: **For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** We've already talked about that, that old part of us, that part that could only and always do what we wanted in our own way, even though we make a mess of everything. That part of us died and we're living a new life that we don't even see. It's hidden. It's **hidden with Christ in God**. Our life is actually from above now. That's the life that we're living in, and although we don't see it, it is more real than anything we can imagine. That's the life we get to live now. It's the hidden life…the hidden life surrendered to a hidden King and a hidden kingdom. You can't see it. You step into it by faith. Jesus is currently the King of the world. He is the Lord of lords, the King of kings, but in His wisdom, in His sovereignty, He has chosen, for the time being, to allow that to remain hidden. People can ignore it. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, but for the time being, it is hidden. People can ignore it. It won't always be that way, but that's where our life is. That means that God is doing things in our very life, that maybe those outside of us, outside in our world, they may not be immediately obvious to them the change that God is bringing about in us. But as we seek after Him, and we seek the things that are above, and we live as citizens of His kingdom, He brings about change in us that one day will be revealed. It is hidden, but it is real. And our hearts, Paul says, our minds are to be focused on that life, that life that is truly life. Now Paul is being very practical. These are two very practical commands, urgings, exhortations. **Keep seeking**. What do you do when you seek? *You look everywhere.*

I told a story a few weeks ago, when we were talking about God bringing us back in Psalm 23, about how Sam was lost once. It was in Madrid, and he was lost I thought, but he was just hiding. What did I do? I looked everywhere! Keep seeking. Look for God and His Kingdom. Inspect everything! Ask God constantly, "What are you doing around me? How do I step into the life that you made available to me?" "Keep seeking! Set your mind on things above!" So since Paul is being so practical here, in these final few minutes we want to be practical. What might that look like for you? How might you live in the joy of the reality that your past in Christ means your former life has died? You've been raised up together with Him. You're living a whole new life, a life of abundance that is available to you in Him. So what does that look like today, this year to step into that, to step into that with great intentionality? That's the word that kind of captures our heart for this year as a church.

Brooklyn already mentioned the **Atlas** booklet to you, and the supplement and that the word on the front of that Atlas is **Intentional**: to live with purpose. Keep seeking; set your mind on things above. Our challenge and our hope as a staff for you, and my hope for you as your pastor, is that you will intentionally step into the life that has been made available to you, that you will take advantage of the rich opportunities made available to you in Christ. How do we do that this year? What might that look like for you? You might get tired of hearing us saying this word **intentional**, but that really is going to be something we are going to harp on. It will be very hard to walk through this year unintentionally, because we want to talk about living with intentionality over and over again. There's so many things that I'm excited about this year…so many opportunities that people can step into…so many ways that I believe God is going to work in our midst.

Here's a little update. This year we might get new carpet. *(laughter)* Hey, okay, there's some tape over there. I see some tape. We've got a lot of bubbles. I was in here yesterday, and there's a gentleman, a faithful guy on our staff named Ben, and his job for, I don't know how many years, during this time of year, is he just brings a syringe of glue around, and he's injecting glue everywhere. We need new carpet! I'm kind of joking about that, but I'm also excited about that. Our youth are launching great opportunities; something called the Greenhouse and the Orchard. These opportunities are for those students that really want to step in more fully, digging deep into God's Word, learning what it is to come before Him in prayer with greater intentionality. Those environments are set up for that. I'm so excited about that. We have a great Kids' Team, with a lot of new faces, but God is doing great things, building on the foundation that He's built over the past few years. And I'm so excited about the fact that they changed their curriculum. I'm excited about the opportunities this new curriculum is going to provide to our kids to take them deeper into God's Word, walking them through all of the Bible in one year. I'm so excited about that. College students are launching into their year and we just hired a new college director, so I'm excited about Trevor and all that he's going to do, the way he's going to minister to our students. Our Life Group team has a training scheduled. Maybe some of you are going to it in a little bit. Our Life Group team, our adult ministry team, is doubling down in their efforts to equip leaders to care for those in need. I hope this year that we are going to have two missionaries stand on stage. We're going to send them out into the lost places in the world to bring the hope of Jesus Christ to those that are currently living in darkness. There is so much that is happening that I am so excited about, but we have to admit this is a year that is a big year for us, and that's why we want to walk through it intentionally.

If you look ahead to August 2026, one year from right now, we will be a different church. Now what I mean by that isn't that the values that have shaped our church for 60 plus years are going to change. They're not. We're going to dig into God's Word. We are going to lift up our voices in worship. We are going to serve Him with all our hearts. None of that changes. But as we mentioned a few weeks ago, and Bryan mentioned it in the spring, the person that God called 30 years ago to lead this church will, for the first time, one year from now, no longer be on our staff, and that is a big change! We want to walk through that with great intentionality hoping for all that God has for us in the future, believing that there is a world that needs to know Jesus Christ, and there is a people of God in this very body that need to be equipped to do the work of ministry. We are passionate about that. We're excited about it, but we are also going to walk intentionally through this year and the change that it's bringing. Consequently, there is an intentional step I'm going to take that I did want to let you know about. In conversation with Bryan and with the elders, we thought you know, before Bryan steps away, the timing is perfect for me to take a brief sabbatical, a time to step away, to focus on resting in God and focus on prayer. And so in the month of September, into the first week or so of October, I'm going to step away which means that Bryan is going to launch our fall series here in a few weeks and preach all through September as we dig into the book of 1 John and we consider what it is to be the community of God. It's going to be an amazing study for us. We consider what it is that God is calling us to, the way He's calling us to love one another, to love Him and to love the world. It's an intentional step that I'm taking. That's me; that's my circumstances; that's wisdom from the board and from Bryan.

I want to be intentional about that, but my question for you this morning is, "What about you?" Are you dreaming about what God might do in your life? The point of the *Atlas* is not for you to read through it and put it away and say, "Oh, that's nice." It's to read it with God and ask Him: "Lord, are there steps that you want me to intentionally take in the year to come?" Are there challenging things that you're calling me to step into by faith, trusting in Your grace to support me and to bring me through? Are there steps that you want me to take to grow in my knowledge of You, to set my mind on things above, enabled, empowered by Your grace? What step might You be calling me to take?" How do we walk through this year with great intentionality, that we would look back in August of 2026 and say, "Look what God has done!" All of it, all of that grounded in our amazing, glorious past that has been brought about in Christ. We died; we've been raised up with Christ. That propels us forward in this present moment, to seek after the things that are above, to take advantage of all the opportunities that God has made available to us in Christ. As we look forward, we await that future with Him, a future that is more glorious than we can possibly imagine. And that's where Paul turns his attention in Verse 4:

> **When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

We don't even know what our lives look like right now. They're more glorious than we can possibly imagine. And there is a day where it is all going to be revealed, where the King will be revealed, and our life that is with Him will be revealed. And when it is revealed, it will be in glory, more glorious than we can possibly imagine…shining like the sun. That's our future in Christ. So until that day, may He find us faithful. May He find us embracing a life of intentionality, trusting in Him, seeking after the things that are above. Let Him find us faithful. Will you join me in prayer?

Our Father, we do marvel at the work that You accomplished through your Son, that on the cross, He paid the debt and accomplished forgiveness. You put our old life to death, as we trust in You by faith, and You have raised us up to live a life of joy and fullness and abundance. So, Lord, I pray that You would stir up in us a deep longing, a deep desire, not for more of the world, but for more of You, and then that You would empower us by Your very grace to step in, to take an intentional step by faith, trusting in You that we might live in the fullness you've made available to us in Christ. Our Father, we await that future day when all will be revealed, and until that day, we pray that You will find us faithful. We pray these things in the name of Your Son, Amen.

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