

New Now

4. Set your sights

January 29, 2023

Welcome to week 4 of our series *New Now*. The book of Colossians tells us we can step into a new life in Jesus not someday in the future or in eternity, but today. The first 2 chapters of Colossians describe what Christ did to make it possible for us to live new now. Today we'll get specific about how to step into that new life.

Prayer: *Lord, as we look at your word today, give us eyes to see what you want us to see, ears to hear what you want us to hear, and the power to act on what your Spirit is saying to us. Amen.*

Cell phones are a tremendous convenience and it's hard to imagine life without them. But their use has increased the number of distracted drivers on the road. Distracted driving can be deadly, so government officials try to take steps to stop people from texting and driving. In chapter 3, Paul is warning the Colossians about the dangers of *distracted living*. When we trust in the risen Jesus, God gives us a new life inside and sets us on a path of purpose and destiny. But if we get distracted by our old life, we'll miss out on our Spirit-led destiny and maybe even crash our future. God offers us a spirit of love, joy, and peace; he gives us each a part to play in his plan for the world and the chance to see him work in deeply personal ways, and a promise of eternal life with him that is ultimately fulfilling. How could we miss that? We miss out more by distraction than by decision. That is, we do not decide one day that we don't want to follow Jesus or that we don't believe that he rose from the dead. More often it is because we get preoccupied with distractions that take us away from him. So Paul begins in **Colossians 3:1-4** *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.** ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* "Set your minds on things above..." --- there it is.

To avoid Distracted Living focus on Jesus and his ways

Verse 2 says, "Set your minds on things above" – that is, set your sights on where God is leading you. Don't be a rubber-necker, don't fall victim to distracted living. If we are staring in our car's rear-view mirror we won't see what's coming. If we are staring at our phones we won't see the kids crossing in front of us. And we can't live like Jesus while staring at the world. Very practically, if we spend 30 hours per week on social media, cable news, and gaming, but spend 1 hour per week with God, that impacts our souls. It shapes the way we think and the way we experience Jesus. We need to live in the world while not losing sight of Jesus. For example, we need to go to work, but we also need to focus on the reality that Jesus is there with us and wants to lead us. We need to pay the bills, but we also need to be aware of the Spirit's whisper of how he is calling us to use our money. And we're going to face temptations but

remember that we have been given a new life and that Jesus is there to help us focus. Where are your eyes focused most of the time? Verse 3 goes on to say, *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.* “You died” means you choose to say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to your old way of life. You are new now. Your new life is hidden with God. A “hidden secret life” is usually negative; as in you have a secret life as a spy or had an affair or are engaged in criminal activity. But having a hidden life in Christ is a very good thing!

Your life is hidden with Christ in God because most people can't see it.

People can see parts of our life like our job, but it's not our job that defines us. People will see who you marry, your hobbies, the school you attend, even your sexuality, but that doesn't define you. Your life is hidden in Christ with God.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God because it's safe.

Sometimes my wife hides chocolate so that I don't find it and devour it. Our lives in Christ are hidden with God so no one can take them. Jesus said in John 10:28 - *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.* They can kill my body, but cannot take my life. God has given us a new life, and in the next section Paul goes on to tell us how to avoid getting distracted by the old life.

To avoid distraction, kill the old life.

Colossians 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.* Put to death – that's pretty drastic. But sometimes it is necessary. In 1898 a pair of lions terrorized construction workers in Kenya. Over a nine month period, the lions hunted down, killed and ate 35 men who were working on the railroad. Workers chased the lions away, but they always returned. Finally, the workers were able to shoot the lions and the danger was past.¹ Notice they did not take the lions home as pets. If they did, you'd think they were nuts. 1 Peter says the devil is like a lion on the prowl, looking to devour us. The sin attached to our old nature needs to be killed, not taken as a pet. We can't pretend to say no to it today while keeping the option open. No, we must kill it. Corpses have no options. Verse 5 lists some of the things of the earth that we are to kill because they distract us from our focus on living our real lives in Jesus.

- Sexual immorality/sex outside of marriage
- Impurity in our thought life
- Lust and uncontrolled sexual urges
- Evil desires and greed

These are all distractions and at their worst are deadly! But they are often renamed in our culture:

¹ See “Tsavo Man-Eaters”

- Sexual immorality becomes “sex positive”
- Impurity is renamed “free thinking”
- Lust is referred to as “natural healthy urges
- Evil desires and greed are “claiming what we deserve”

You could probably fill in other phrases. The most accurate word for these actions is “idolatry.” Idolatry is placing something other than God at the center of our lives. When we choose to give in to these forces, we are choosing them over our faithfulness to God. That is idolatry. It is worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. These distractions will jump up into our field of vision everyday unless we choose to die to them. And we need to die to them. ⁶ *Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.* Just like distracted driving, distracted living carries a cost and it never ends well. ⁷ *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.* ⁸ *But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.* ⁹ *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices* ¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* Paul just listed sins that that can cause sin in our relationships. And Paul points out that human divisions can distract us from our real lives hidden with Jesus. ¹¹ *Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

In God’s kingdom, people who normally wouldn’t get along are bound together as the family of God. Heather King is a writer and commentator. She is also a recovering alcoholic who has come to faith in Christ. When she first became a part of a church she wrote: *My first impulse was to think, My God, I don't want to get sober (or in the case of the church, worship) with THESE nutcases! (or boring people, or people with different politics, taste in music, food, books, or whatever). Nothing shatters our egos like worshipping with people we did not hand-pick The humiliation of discovering that we are thrown in with extremely unpromising people!—people who are broken, misguided, wishy-washy, out for themselves. People who are ... us. But we don't come to church to be with people who are like us in the way we want them to be. We come because we have staked our souls on the fact that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the church is the best place, the only place, to be while we all struggle to figure out what that means. We come because we'd be hard pressed to say which is the bigger of the two scandals of God: that he loves us—or that he loves everyone else. – Heather King*

So we are to kill expressions of the old life and embrace a new way life. And what does it look like to focus on heaven’s ways? Verses 12-15 tells us: ¹² *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.* ¹⁵ *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

An undistracted life is a life of love

Loving others keeps us focused on our new life. Jesus said, *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” We hear a lot about leadership these days. One successful entrepreneur and business leader told me, “I spent so many years trying to be a great leader. If I had to do it over again I would work to be great at loving others.” There was some regret in his voice. How about you? Is love your chief aim? Would others recognize that in you? In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul tells us no matter what we do or accomplish, if we don’t love it is worth nothing in the end. Let’s get specific. Verses 12-13 list some very practical ways we are to show love. Let’s do an inventory on our own lives here:

- * *Show compassion*; Am I compassionate toward others?
- * *Kindness*, Am I kind to other people?
- * *Humility*, Am I focused on myself or on the person across from me?
- * *Gentleness and patience*. Would others describe me as gentle and patient?
- * *Bear with each other*, Am I easily annoyed by other people?
- * *Forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone*. Do I forgive others as the Lord forgave me? Paul is emphasizing forgiveness. We are called to forgive elsewhere in scripture where Jesus commands it. Forgive!

To maintain love, we must forgive

Paul repeatedly emphasizes love and forgiveness in his letters to the churches because without them churches will fall apart. In fact, so will friendships, families and marriages. Imperfect people rub each the wrong way at times. We need to know how to deal with that. Until we are all completely transformed into the image of Jesus, we will have occasional friction in our relationships. If you aren’t totally like Jesus, then you will cause a problem for someone else at some point. And then you will need forgiveness. The only way to have a lasting marriage is to learn to forgive. Over our 40+ years of marriage, I know I have hurt Linda at times. It pains me to say it, but I know it’s true. And I know that she has forgiven me. If she had not, we couldn’t be close. She might be justified to remind me about this or that time and to feel resentful, but that wouldn’t help her to love me; in fact it would erode her love. And it would not fulfill her. The only way to have a long-standing friendship is to learn to forgive because at some point we will be hurt. The only way to love anyone is to learn to forgive. And how is that? Verse 13 says “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” How does the Lord forgive us? He doesn’t ignore what we did, he doesn’t pretend it didn’t matter. He takes our sin seriously. But he chooses not to give us what we deserve. Aren’t you glad the Lord doesn’t give us what we deserve? Some in this room may live expecting God to give them what they deserve even though they asked for forgiveness. **1 John 1:9 says *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just* (which means he does what he says he’ll do) *to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

He forgives completely – that is, he doesn’t bring it up again.

That is how we are to forgive – to choose not to get even; to choose not to give the other person what they deserve.

Forgiveness is not a feeling; it doesn't mean that we forget what the other person did – though at some point we may not think about it anymore. Forgiveness is a choice.

We do this with people we love. And if you want to show love to another person, forgive them.

It's a lot easier to forgive others when you know you've been forgiven. And it is a lot easier to love others when we know we are loved. It's no coincidence that Paul says, "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved...*" and then tells us to love others. It's my prayer today that you will know and sense the love of God. He gave himself for you. He offers you a new life. Starting now.