

Made Alive In Christ: A Life Pleasing To God

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Hey, good evening everyone. Go ahead and open us up as we go into the Lord in prayer.

Father, I just think upon how much you love us, Lord, that you want us to experience all that we have in Christ. And so I pray, Father, that you would work upon our hearts this evening in such a way that we would come out of hearing your word with praise and thanksgiving for what you have done in us in Christ. Help Father us to depend upon your Holy Spirit to bring the word alive into our hearts, into our minds, to every area of our affections. And so I pray, Father, that your word would reveal to us how much you love us. And I pray that you would help us to see more clearly and more brilliance and more of your glory through all that we have in your word tonight. And I pray, God, that you would just open up the horizon, stretch it beyond all of our horizons, Father, we can see more and more the brilliance of your glory. Certainly we can all experience more of your glory. And so, Father, I pray that you would bless us with this understanding and this viewpoint from your perspective on our lives. And I pray that you would just grant your blessing upon this message and to our hearts. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

I want you to kind of think about this feeling of if you were to grab your phone, let's say, during the day and you picked it up and you thought, well, I'm just going to spend just a few seconds on my phone and then has it ever happened to you that it went beyond those few seconds to few minutes and possibly few hours. That happens. It happens. And you wonder why that happens. You know, sometimes we don't plan it. We

didn't want to do that. Yet oftentimes our minds feel cluttered and our souls feel perpetually exhausted when that happens over and over again. And we assume that it's something that is wrong with us, that we don't have enough strength to overcome the temptation to spend so much time on our phones.

But here's the thing: our devices are designed that way to grab your attention and to do it in such a way that it feels very subtle. And it feels as though your brain doesn't have the capacity to focus for long periods of time without looking at your device for all various sorts of reasons. And again this could be for good or bad reasons. I'm primarily not focusing on the good. Right, you should be using your phone to connect with people. If you have a Bible app, it's good for that as well. I'm primarily talking about things that we shouldn't be doing, spending countless hours on the news or on some sort of media platform that just drains our energy, drains our love for the word, love for Christ. Those are the things I'm going to emphasize tonight.

And I'm going to be doing this throughout for the next five weeks. Five weeks I'm going to be focusing on how we can be better aligned, better focused, not to pay attention to these kinds of distractions on our devices and more focused and paying attention on what Christ has for us as believers in this day and age. Okay? In this day and age of what I call algorithms, the age of algorithm discipleship. So for the next five weeks I'm going to expose distractions that dominate us and uncover how to reclaim the focus that we once had, the attention that we were able to have just in His word, in prayer, in community without the phone getting in the way. So if you're struggling with a cluttered mind or a weary soul, I hope that this series will help your soul and resonate deeply within you and help you to not have the cluttered mind and a weary soul.

Screens were once used for simple lenses that you were able to look through, meaning that you would be able to view the world through a TV set or a projector. It was merely to be viewed upon. But today in the age that we live in, screens are not just being viewed. They are actually

looking back at you. They are actually responding to you. This is the day and age we live in. That's what I want us to focus on. For example, your screen. It looks at what you watch. It looks at what you click on. It fuels your emotions, not the good kind. Your anger, your anxiety, your stress. It feeds on those things and it keeps you scrolling, feeding you more of these things. This is what our devices have been designed to do.

And I want us to think about these kinds of distractions, that it's no longer unintentional, but that these distractions are actually formational. That's why I use the word discipleship. You are actually being formed by your devices. The algorithm isn't just stealing your time away. It is actually shaping you in your fear, in what you envy, what you crave, and what you believe in. All of that. It's your heart on display. We need to live in an age where that can be almost so seamless now than ever before.

So long before algorithms were programmed and digital feeds were engineered, the Spirit of God warned us about the battle for human attention. Okay, this is centuries ago. Such as King Solomon in the Old Testament, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament identified this exact vulnerability of the human condition. They understood that whatever holds your attention, your focus, your gaze will eventually direct your heart. This is really important. So if you forget everything else, write this down on your innermost heart: What feeds your focus forms your soul. It's no longer unintentional. Like I said, what feeds your focus forms your soul.

So with that said, turn with me to Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23. We're going to look at one passage in the Old Testament and then a couple of passages in the New Testament on this point. Proverbs 4:23. It reads, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." I want you to notice the first word there, keep. It means to guard, to watch over, protect. Imagine a fortress, a castle guarded under heavy artillery fire from the enemy. Another illustration is a watchman. A watchman would be the one watching the enemy at the gates and beyond to the

horizon. And so think of that picture. It's not just standing there for no reason. It's standing because there's an enemy and he wants to get in. In this case, your heart. He wants to get into your heart. If he can get into your heart, he can form your soul. He can form your very soul. So this is why Solomon says with all diligence, this is not something you fool around with. It's with all diligence because out of the heart are the outgoings of life. So your life flows outward from what you allow inward. What you allow into your heart will flow out of your heart. This is the way God designed us. That's why it's so important how and what we allow inside of us.

So if an algorithm is permitted to feed upon your heart, which that's what it's designed to do, it will generate all sorts of things out of your heart, all sorts of distractions, all sorts of envies and your fears and your anxieties, and ultimately will be dictating your formation.

Observe then with me in the New Testament how the Apostle Paul demonstrates the way your life flows outward if you do it right depends on what you let in first. So he again, it's the same context: what you allow in will come out manifest outward of your life. So turn with me then to Colossians chapter 3 and we're going to look at verses 1 to 3.

Apostle Paul says this: If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

So I want you to focus on the three words in verse two: Set your affection. This means your mindset, your intense focus, your active orientation. Paul doesn't say feel your affections. No, he says set your affection. That's where we get mindset from. Mind set. He's not talking about your emotions here. So here's what I want you to observe. Paul was writing to believers caught between two tensions. On one side, legalism, meaning a rule-based salvation. I followed these strict rules to earn God's favor. Merit over grace. That was on one side. And then the

other side is living in worldly indulgence. Meaning do whatever feels right, go with whatever you feel like doing. So one strict laws, another side loose living, and this is the tension that the Colossian church in Colosse were dealing with. And so both forms were distractions to the Christians there. Paul's diagnosis isn't that they are rebellious. No. God changed the believer's heart to no longer be in rebellion against God. That has been already settled upon salvation. But now they are distracted by these two strong tensions in their life. These are what we call worldly desires, worldly things. And they were both distractions for their spiritual growth in Christ. They were attempting to live this new resurrected life in Christ while continually setting their affection on everyday activities, the human activities of mundane things like eating and drinking and so on, or being overwhelmed by the human depravity raging against their own depravity. And so they were being pulled left and right by all the noise in the world.

And what was Paul's remedy to that? Okay, don't focus on these two things. Rather, you have to be completely in a different plane as it were. So he says, set your affections on things above. You can't—there's nothing good here horizontally. There's nothing good. To your left, legalism. To your right, worldly indulgence. You won't find it here on earth. So he says, "Constantly set your affections on things above." And he continues on in the text, "For you are dead." What does that mean? Well, it's your old life. Your old life of sin. It no longer has control over your life as before, and you're no longer living the standards of the world, legalism, worldly indulgence. This is not our lifestyle anymore. Your life is rather hid with Christ in God. In verse three, this is your real life as a believer in Christ: that our ultimate identity is not found in anything in the world but identified in Christ. In Christ we are protected from eternal judgment and from anything that affects our eternal soul. And then remember I give the imagery of a fortress. Well, in order for Satan to get to us, he has to get through Christ and into God. That's what it means to be hid in Christ. Do you think about that on a daily basis, that Satan can't directly attack you? He has to go past Christ, past God.

If you don't think about it, then how is He going to help you through your life challenges?

Look with me in verses 5-9. He then goes on what it looks like to set your affections on things above. He focuses on verses 5-9 that there is an old man in you. The old man again of living the standard of this world, and you're to put that old man off. And then in verses 10 to 14, this new nature to put on. So I'm going to go ahead and just read verses 5 through 14 and notice the transitions. So verse 5 and on, the old man put off. Verse 10 to 14, the new man in Christ put on. And so verse five: Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

I want you to look at the word mortify in verse five. Means to kill off or starve. You cannot refine this old nature. You cannot perfect this old nature. It must be killed off and starved. That's the only way. That's what mortify means. Only then can you put on the character of Christ, the new man. We saw some of that in verses 10-14. You see what he's saying here is that your mind cannot remain neutral. You're either putting on, putting off, putting off, putting on. There is no neutrality

here. And we know that across Scripture. So Paul lays it out. You're either starving the old nature and putting on Christ or you're starving your soul and putting on the culture. And how much of that culture is so much fed into us through our devices? So how do we move from then a culture of the world to actually responding to the Spirit of God? How do we let go of our devices? Put off our devices in a way that dictate our desires and forms us and set our affections on things above. This is how information without application leads to zero transformation. Apostle Paul lays out clearly from verses 5-9 and 10 to 14 of what we're supposed to be doing. That's the transformation that God wants with every believer in Christ. This is how you set your affections on things above. It's a day-to-day process. That's what sanctification is. We're becoming more and more like Christ day unto day. Think about it. Putting off those things God has revealed to us that those things are ugly. Those things are foul. If you're a believer in Christ, that is now how you see your old nature. There is nothing good about it. Nothing sweet, nothing beautiful at all. And so you have to constantly understand that as a believer in Christ. And then He has formed your affections. He oriented you. That's the word to affect the affections. He's changed your orientation to now wanting the things that God has for you in Christ. So now you actually desire those affections. Those are now beautiful to you. Those are things that are sweet to you. Those are things that are good to you. And so to starve then off the old nature and feed your soul with the right kind of affection.

Think of it as some practical things here that I'm going to share with you today. Before unlocking your device, before starting your day, logging onto your screen, here are some practical questions to ask yourself. How can we set our affections on things above? Here's our three questions to ask: When am I looking? Why am I looking? What am I looking at? So let's go through those three questions. When am I looking? Is it the moment I wake up, I'm bored. Are you anxious? Am I anxious? When am I looking at my phone? Second, why am I looking? Am I seeking peace? Am I seeking escape? Am I seeking validation or a distraction?

Third, what am I looking at? Is this feeding my focus on setting my affection on things above or is it forming my anxieties? Is it feeding on the anxieties? So those are three questions to ask yourself. The when, the why, the what. Because you're looking at your device all of the time, but do you ever ask why you're doing it, when you're doing it, and what you're doing it for? And then establish in your time with God, preferably in the morning, first thing when your eyes are open, before you look at anything on your device, start with the word of God. Start with the word of God. I personally like to just have a physical Bible so that I don't have to go through all the things that I have to go through to just get to my Bible on my device. Have a physical Bible. Go to your devotions. Have a place where you're consistently going to the word first. And essentially you're giving God first priority. You're giving God first priority and then set some boundaries. In the words of mortify, how can you orient yourself in your day to where you're putting God first, putting your mind set on things above? Can you do that when you're having a meal or 30 minutes during the day in the morning before you even open up your phone? You go immediately into prayer. You feed your soul first before you feed your flesh. And you do that through prayer and scripture reading.

Why is this so important? You may ask. Why is this so urgent? Well, the Lord Jesus doesn't just inform us. He's not just informing us through the apostles, through King Solomon. That's not just to inform. No, the Lord Jesus wants to form our loves by putting God first. He is our first love. And then we go on with all other loves in our lives. Remember I gave a message on orderly love. You see, if you go the other way around, just focusing on information only, nothing will really change. No real transformation. Don't you want the Lord Jesus to form your love? You see, that's what He's wanting to do in your life. Because who you love shapes what you practice in your life. And so you know that the miracle of salvation isn't just that the Lord Jesus stops us from sinning. No, it goes beyond that. He changes our affections. He completely reorients us to things that please God. That's what He does. He changes our mindset.

He changes our focus to be intensely on Him and then to actively orient us to Him, position us to Him, to love Him as He loves us. And so when we set our affections on Christ in God, God changes our spiritual appetite. Yes, we have a spiritual appetite. The things that you once used to crave, you no longer crave because it's been starved. That's what that word mortify means. Remember, it's to starve. An appetite you once had, you now find it tasteless. In fact, you don't even have a taste for it as you once did. You no longer crave those appetites, but now you crave the things after God. You no longer find validation like you used to because your life is hid with Christ in God. You are validated in Him and that's all that matters. You don't need human validation anymore. Your life is hid with Christ in God. And so this is how we can truly live the way He's meant to be lived in Christ.

And so instead of again the legalism side—"Okay, I must just simply reduce my phone usage and get rid of all these apps and try to use less time"—I know that's legalism, and I want to make that clear. That's not what I'm asking. But rather, where is your heart oriented? Is your relationship with Him? Remind yourself of Hebrews 12:2: Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Don't try to look to find ways that you can do things. If you just simply look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, He will complete the good work in you. Those things that you try to do won't ever work. Leave it unto the Lord. Just look to Him. And that relationship when you have with Him, then while you're focusing on Him, you'll be less focused on those other things. Isn't that good that He takes care of us? He just wants our heart. He wants us to love Him and trust Him that He's the author and finisher of our faith. Allow Him to set the day ahead. Allow Him to set the day. Let Him speak to you through His word day in and day out in prayer. Starve the old nature. He's given us the ability to starve it off because we now know what to focus on, what to starve, laid out in verses 5-9. Feed your soul on verses 10-14 day in and day out. This is how you have a relationship with the Lord through His word. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Keep Him close to heart with His word. Set

your affection on the one who holds your life. He's the one that holds our life. He knows everything about us. Again, what feeds your focus forms your soul. You feed on the word of God. You focus on the word of God. You are focusing on the Lord Jesus. And that's who will form your soul. Isn't that good? Isn't that good that He will form our soul for eternal good?

So I want us to close out tonight. I've done this a couple of times. I'm going to ask a couple of the men that usually pray. I'm going to ask you to stand for three prayer requests. I want you to pray us out tonight. So, brother Scythe, can you please pray for this first: that we would guard our hearts as it says in Proverbs 4:23, and that we have better abilities to discern the enemies, those things that are distracting to us, and not allow those things to enter into our hearts. Can we please pray for that?