

Good morning Church! My name is Trent Houck, and it's my joy to be one of the Pastors here at FCBC. I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Colossians 3:1-4 and have that open in front of you as we set this passage up.

Here is my main point today: Jesus is the *Focal Point* of the Christian Life.

Because Jesus is the focal point:

God calls Christians to seek Christ, set the mind on Christ, and to see Christ.

1. Seek Christ (Colossians 3:1)
2. Set the Mind on Christ (Colossians 3:2-3)
3. See Christ (Colossians 3:4).

Jesus saves us into a life of *singular focus*.

Our argument today is set against the backdrop of the human condition. That is, living with multiple *focal points*. For example, we want flourishing families. So, we try to center our lives on family. We want flourishing bodies. So, we focus ourselves on happiness and health. We want financial stability. We want to be relieved of our stress. So, we adopt practices that minimize strain. We track our sleep, see a counselor, or become minimalists. Our hearts are crowded by the objects of desire.

The more we want something, the more we *focus* on it.

I want to begin this morning by asking a few simple questions: *What do you want? What do you desire? What motivates your affections? What is the focus of your life?*

My argument this morning is that we *want* whatever it is that takes up the imaginative space of our hearts. It's what we think about when we have nothing else to think about. We want those things that we are sure to keep an eye on. We want those things to which we pay closest attention.



Let me just illustrate this by the idea of a *focal point*. What is the focal point of this first image? The obvious answer is the single air balloon. Your eye is drawn to the center of this picture. You probably feel a sense of peace.

The lake is serene and placid. The sky is monochromatic. The trees are all aligned. The horizon is linear. It's beautiful. This is what it's like to have a single focus.



However, if I show you a contrasting image. What is the focal point of this second image? The answer is debatable. There may be no focal point. Maybe it's the largest balloon. Maybe it's the nearest. Maybe it's the one in the center of the picture. Your eye moves around, rather than staying focused on a single point. You might feel a sense of stress, unease, or crowdedness. I am personally anxious about the balloons

running into each other and seeing people fall from their wicker baskets.

The Old Testament is a single story about competing *focal points*. God commands that his people "have no other gods before me", and he warns that those who construct idols, or take on false gods, become like them. This is *not* because God feels threatened, or wants to steal our joy, but precisely because he knows that he *alone* is the source of our highest joys. He proscribes a life of singularity.

The Bible teaches that what we want, desire, or pursue eventually becomes the *object* of our affections. Our pleasures become our pressures. God knows that we are habitual creatures, and that whatever we take pleasure in becomes precious to us.



This generation is characterized by the disembodied, *absent presence* of unchecked desires. We are walking zombies. If you were to ask a sociologist what this generation of people wanted more than anything, I think the sociologist's answer would be: "Everything and Nothing." We are a distracted people, holding hands with God, while engrossed in finding satisfaction in this world. We are everywhere and nowhere at once. Jesus addresses us as

the Martha generation: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41-42). This is a dangerous way to live. Cal Newport warns that, "[If you] Spend enough time in a state of frenetic shallowness and you *permanently* reduce your capacity to perform deep [focused] work." This concept also applies to deep worship. Even Winnie the Pooh once

famously said, "Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart." Little things become focal points.

So, what do you *want*? What is the *focal point* of your life? As a Pastor, I am constantly wrestling with multiple objects of desire. I want our church to be unified. I want ministries to be flourishing. I want to preach well. I want to write. I want to administrate. I want to persuade. I want friends. I want clarity and precision in my thinking. I want to read. I want to feel. I want my marriage to thrive. I want my kids to excel. I want to leave this place better than I found it. I want to be missed when I'm gone. Which of these will become the focus? Well, it depends on the time of day!

The Christian life, however, is one of *singular focus*. We need to know, more than any other generation that we *cannot* have everything, do everything, experience everything, see everything, be everything, or maintain everything without losing something.

Jesus famously said:



24 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. **26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26).



Echoing Jesus, the American Missionary to Ecuador, Jim Elliot, once wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." And, C.T. Studd, once wrote, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." Or, to quote our very own Steve Walker: "In 70 years, none of this will matter."

What do you want? What is the focus of your life? The Christian can only be about one thing.

To say with the Psalmist,

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple (Psalm 27:4).

Are you ready to be about one thing? Do you *want* to be about one thing?

We are learning that the Colossians were quite like us. They were at a spiritual set of crossroads. They were being tempted to engage in an infinite number of distractions that would cloud their vision and affection for Jesus. Their one life was threatened and assailed by "...philosophy and empty deceit" (Col. 2:8). Their lives were judged on the basis of what they ate and drank and how they organized their liturgical calendar (Col. 2:16-19). So, they were tempted to submit to regulations that were "...of no value in stopping the flesh" (Col. 2:20-23). The pressures were mounting. In short, they were being given a set of metrics to measure their sense of assurance or spiritual fitness. They were being tempted to regress to the *spiritual shallows* of multiple focal points.



The false teachers were whispering, 'You can have it all!'" They were beginning to slide down the slope of self-righteousness. 'Holiness is this way. Follow us to Christ."



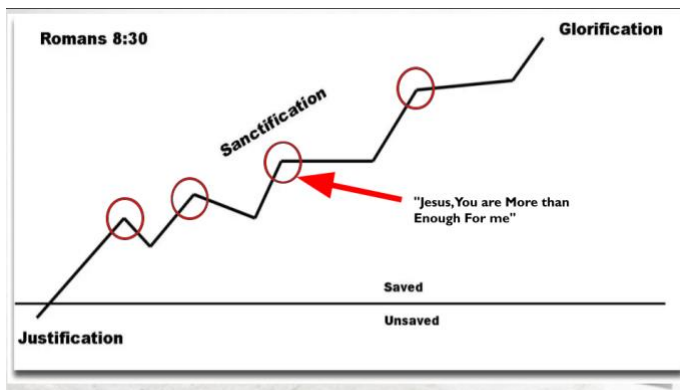
Paul, having furiously warned of the dangers of succumbing to this kind of frenetic and chaotic life, now demonstrates in all of chapter three what the Christian life ought to be focused on. And, we can say plainly, that it ought to be focused on Christ *alone*. Jesus Christ is the single and solitary *focal point* of the Christian life.

There is only one thing that should *really* matter to the Christian: Jesus Christ. Jesus is enough. There is only one road and only one way.

So, we must ask: *Why* do other focal points crowd out our gaze on Christ? Isn't it astounding to think that Christians, who have come to know Jesus Christ, to

love "the glory of God in the face of Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:6), to be filled in Christ (Col. 2:8-10), to be born again to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), could ever grow *distracted* by other things? Paul certainly thought so as he wrote to the Galatians, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel..." (Galatians 1:6). Why does this happen?

You might remember that last week David challenged us to reflect on *why* we make human-centered rules to maintain our sense of self-righteousness. He said, "The answers to the deeper 'why' questions will reveal a reward you are pursuing or a pain you're avoiding." We start making rules when we get our eyes



off of Jesus. Why *aren't* we growing in Christ? Why are we discouraged, or stuck? Maybe the answer is that we've made *our* growth the focus of our gaze, instead of Jesus. We're still, in some small way, focused on ourselves! To our surprise, our relationship with God may be about us, and not God. Our Bible reading may have become a vendetta to get something *from* God, rather than be *with* God.

The problem for the Colossians is the same problem for us. They were tempted to add to Jesus.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, we get spiritually stuck when we add something to Jesus. The human-focused way to get unstuck is to adopt idols. New rules. But, that only deepens our ruts. Our hearts are 'idols factories' and rule-producing.

Jesus shows us a better way.

God calls the Christian to seek Christ, Set the mind on Christ, and See Christ.

1. Seek Christ (Colossians 3:1)
2. Set the Mind on Christ (Colossians 3:2-3)
3. See Christ (Colossians 3:4).

Heavenly Father, we come before you again and ask that you would magnify your name. We want to seek the one thing that really matters. Your words divide between soul and spirit, joint and marrow, and we would ask that you would use it

to cut through our defenses. Show us our disordered desires and the ways in which we are inclined to make something or someone else central to our lives.

Jesus, thank you that you not only show us what it means to live with a singular focus, but for the joy set before you, you endured the Cross. Your perfect righteousness is now imputed to us by faith so that we stand before you righteous and not guilty. We can now stand before you totally focused on you *alone*.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would apply these truths directly to the areas of our hearts that we most need them today. Cause us to be open to your ministry, available to your Word, and attentive to your voice. Cause us to be able and willing to lay aside those things that are not central to our purpose in you. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.

First, the Christian is called to seek Christ. Paul writes,

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

The statement "If then you have been raised with Christ..." draws us back to the arguments that Paul was making in Colossians 2:8-15. He writes, "...you were raised with him[that is, Christ] through faith by the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). While in English, the conditional 'if' seems to indicate doubt, (i.e. if you really love me, you will do the dishes) in Greek, this is what is called a 'first class condition'. That is, something that is assumed for the sake of the argument. So, Paul is saying: "If [as it is the case that] you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is..." He is not contradicting what he said previously. He is showing a connection between the reality of our resurrected state and the command in the second part of the verse.

Essentially, he is saying: because you were raised from the dead with Christ, you now exist in a new sphere. You have been transferred into a new dimension, a new kingdom. You are now participating in the new creation. The Kingdom has arrived in Jesus, and it is now being made evident through the work of the Holy Spirit.

You have a new identity. A new self.

Resurrections happen as people *believe* the Gospel.

We need to pause here and express a sense of wonder. When did this resurrection happen? Paul indicates that this is a past tense, completed action. You "have been raised with Christ." Furthermore, this is something that took place *while* we were in a state of deathly passivity. He wrote earlier in chapter 2

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ (Col. 2:13).

Illustration: maybe you have personally witnessed the unresponsiveness of a dead body. They are cold to the touch, immovable, and no matter how loudly you might address the body, he or she would not respond. That is, unless God was speaking.

Have you been raised? How would you know?

The New Testament reframes the Old Testament idea of resurrection. If you read the gospels, the disciples are consistently confused about when the resurrection will happen. In Jewish tradition, resurrection only happens at the end of the age, if at all. The New Testament, however, teaches that there are different *types* of resurrection. In Luke 7, for example, the gospel writer shows a physical, material resurrection in the here and now:

11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. **12** As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. **13** When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

14 Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" **15** The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

So, there you go: dead people can hear Jesus. That's why if any of you are spiritually dead in this room right now, the second that Jesus wants to, he can say, "Young man, or young woman, I say to you, get up!"

But, physical, material resurrection is not what Paul has in mind here. The resurrection that Paul has in mind is a resurrection *with Christ*. That is, the resurrection here is one that happens *through faith*. Paul writes,

"...you were also raised *with him* through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12).

Jesus died on the cross and was buried in the tomb. On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead. When he was raised, Paul says, you were also raised! This outward, objective, historical reality becomes spiritually significant for you as you believe. It happens within you *through faith*. That is, the evidence of a spiritual resurrection is not physical, material change but spiritual alertness and responsiveness. Paul writes elsewhere, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). When Jesus speaks, those who have faith respond.

This is describing what theologians call regeneration. That is, the new birth. When God speaks, he acts. And, as that action takes place, God calls into being something that was not previously there. God does not perform CPR on a nearly dead heart. He creates a new one. That is why Paul says that when you are buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life.

You are a new creation in Christ Jesus. If you are a Christian, you are a walking miracle.

This should never cease to amaze you!

So, now that you are spiritually alive by the power of God, what are you supposed to be up to now? Paul says,

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

The Christian is called to be *continually seeking* the priorities of God's throne room. It is, as it were, that we continually rap on heaven's door. We are continually placing the priorities of Jesus on our calendars. One author writes, the things that

are above, "...include his[Jesus'] character, his presence, his heavenly joys. We are not to be seeking heavenly geography, but the One who dwells there."

Illustration: If you are familiar with the film *Free Solo*, you know that rock climber, Alex Honnold gives us a great example of this. The central aim of his life was to free solo El Capitan in Yosemite, CA: a 3,000 climb up sheer granite wall without a rope. To "seek" this mountain peak meant to daily, monthly, and yearly training, planning and preparation to scale this wall. Seeking this peak involved careful planning, meticulous placement of hands, feet, fitness, and food intake. The cost for failure was extremely high. El Capitan set the agenda. Alex Honnold conformed his life, his fitness, and his focus to El Capitan.



In the same way the Christian's seeking the things that are above defines the Christian life. We are always climbing further up and further into the Person and Work of Christ.

Do you have this kind of exalted picture of the living Christ?

Jesus is glorious and unreachable, invisibly *seated at the right hand of God*.

Underlying this text is Psalm 110:1,

The Lord says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

The Father says to the Son, "Take the throne."

Hebrews also speaks of this throne room in this way:

3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:3-4).

To sit down at the right hand of God is to take up the kingly residence that the whole Old Testament anticipates. It is the highest place. Jesus is preeminent. There is no higher place with which to be preoccupied.

To the Christian, this text is saying: "Do that which you most enjoy, and never stop doing it." Seek Christ continually. Set your eyes on Christ.

For the new creature in Christ, this is *not* drudgery.

But, it requires total focus and devotion. It is upward and onward.

Sermon Illustration: Shasta Fetching

Illustration: we are blessed with an Australian Shepherd, Black Labrador Retriever who doesn't need to be told to "continually fetch a tennis ball." It's part of his nature. In fact, it's baked into his name as a retriever. However, if something compelling comes along as a distraction, like a squirrel, he does need to be reminded! In the same way Paul is reminding the Colossians to 'seek Christ.'

How does the Christian do this? If Christ is high and exalted like this, how do we reach up to where he is? Those questions lead to the second point.

Second, Christians are called to set their minds on Christ. The Christian is called to make their new creation lives about seeking Christ, and conforming your life to Christ is regulated by setting the mind on Christ.

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Let me illustrate what this looks like first:

Sermon Illustration 1: "Hold on!"

Illustration: One of the keys to parenting is manufacturing fun things for your kids to do. We decided, when there was no snow, to take our kids sledding. One of the key commands in sledding is "Hold on!" Keep a tight grip on the sled. While my kids are clinging on for dear life, I am moving them forward. In the same way, the Christian advances in the Christian life by clinging to the cross, by keep our eyes fixed on the Gospel. Rather than advancing on the strength of our moral efforts, the Christian is pulled forward by the strength that the Spirit provides because we have already been seated as Sons and Daughters with Christ.

So, what does 'clinging' or 'setting' our minds on Christ look like?

First, we need to be clear that the *physiological brain* and *spiritual mind* are not the same thing. When Jesus rebukes Peter for misunderstanding Jesus' purpose he says, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matthew 16:23). Jesus is not saying that Peter has made an intellectual error, though the intellect is a part of the mind. Jesus is not mainly saying, "You marked A instead of B; you failed the test!" He's saying, "The whole way you think about things is actually Satanic, Peter." *Whoa*. Your mind is framed with *Satanic* presuppositions. You don't have the right priorities. Further, when Paul uses this word in Philippians 2, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus," Paul is not saying: "Have a *single brain*" though surely he wanted them to think about things similarly.

In this text:

- 1. This is the new, resurrection 'mind'.** This is the mind that has been raised from the dead. The mind that responds in faith, trust, and hope. The mind that is unified to Christ by the Holy Spirit. This is the mind that is powered by the Gospel. This is your whole way of thinking now that you are alive in Christ. It's not just the brain. That's why our application can't just be "Memorize Scripture, read your Bible, or Say your prayers." Scripture memory ninjas might have strong brains, but weak *minds*.
- 2. This new mind is yours.** When a person becomes a Christian, God does not rob them of agency. You are not made less yourself when you become a Christian, but a new self in Christ Jesus. Everything you do, and everything

you are is now in relationship to the living Christ. So, the new you has a unique *mind*. Your God-centered perspective is still yours.

3. This mind makes choices. It is possible for the new mind in Christ to either be fixated on things above or things that are on the earth, but not both at the same time.



a. **Illustration:** A few years ago, due to some health issues, I began eating gluten-free. This involved a change of mind, or a change of heart. I left the world of pizza, pasta, and sourdough bread for a world of rice, meat, and salads. Once I had tasted and seen the new world of new energy, new emotional stability, I didn't *want* to go back.

a. **Application:** by setting our minds on things above, we are going with the grain of our newly created selves. Sin, for the Christian, is actually a weariness, not a joy. Following Jesus, empowered by the Spirit is the gravitational pull toward Christ and not away from him.

b. **Connection:** this is what is so silly about adding rules to Christ. We don't grow by making life harder on ourselves.

We grow by taking on Christ's easy yoke. The truth is that being singularly focused is surprisingly way easier than having multiple foci.

So Paul says,

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

So, what is this new hidden life like?

Illustration: we play hide and seek quite a bit in my house. When Sam is "hidden with Damaris in the closet", they are usually pretty loud and easy to find. On the



other hand, if I go play hide and seek in the Boise National Forest, the tragic headline might read: "Man lost, hidden with dog in the forest."

Verse 3 is perplexing. It requires us to exercise our imaginations. Paul says, "Set your minds [that is, the new mind that is united to Christ's mind] on things that are above...FOR [reason] you [that is, the old mind and heart that was crucified with Christ] have died, and your life [the totality of your new selfhood] is hidden [invisible] with Christ in God. One commentator writes, "...[Christians'] lives are now securely hidden with Christ in God and thus belong to the

invisible realm. Their sphere of being, action, and enjoyment is therefore now totally different from that of their former situation." So, setting your minds on what is above is the natural outflow of your new nature.

Do you see what this means? If you are a Christian, you *already* live in heaven.

Hebrews 12 puts it this way:

22 *But you have come* to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The Christian lives *spiritually* in the City of God. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." So, your participation in the Kingdom of God is the natural outflow of your new citizenship in heaven.

But, you might say, that's not mapping onto my experience. That leads us to our last point.

Third, are called to see Christ. Even though the Christian participates in all of this *through faith* now, they cannot yet *see* the things for which they hope. What we see is only partial. Though this is the true reality: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God," we live in the here and now where we are still learning how to put on our new selves.

Hebrews puts it this way:

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13-16).

However, even though we cannot see all this yet, we are assured of a *promise* in this next verse:

4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

God has appointed a date for the return of Christ. It will certainly happen. As sure as we are that August 8th is coming, we can be sure that Christ will return. For the Christian, this is *not* a day to be fearful, but a day for which we long. This is good news for two reasons.

First, Because Christ will appear, we will appear too. We need to rest assured that when he comes, we will see him. Whether we are living or dead, we will all see the living Christ when he comes. This is a moment planned in history.

Illustration: The simultaneity, or singularity of this event is quite like when someone knocks on our door: the kids run to the door, the dog barks, the parents finish cleaning. It's a simultaneous event to which we all respond. We will not miss it!

Second, Because Christ appears, we will appear in his glory. This verse is an invitation to meditate on heaven.

Activity: Look around you for a moment. How glorious does the person who is sitting next to you appear? Don't answer that. The truth is that if the person next to you is in Christ, they will one day be absolutely radiant.

1 John 3 says it this way,

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

The Psalmist, anticipating this day says,

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness (Psalm 17:15).

Romans 8:28-30 says,

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,^[h] for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Would you like to spend 30 minutes in heaven? Ladies and gentlemen, *through faith* you just did! One day, our faith will be sight. And, we will finally realize that our time in the Word, our fellowship with one another, our worship in this place was closest we ever came to heaven in this mortal life.

To close, in C.S. Lewis' *The Weight of Glory*, he writes,

“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light

of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.”



In 100 years, when this generation is dead and gone, what will really matter is Christ. He is, therefore, the only single focal point worth living for. Let us live for him! Let's be rooted in him.

Summary:

God calls Christians to seek Christ, set the mind on Christ, and to see Christ.

1. Seek Christ (Colossians 3:1)
2. Set the Mind on Christ (Colossians 3:2-3)
3. See Christ (Colossians 3:4).

Because Jesus *alone* sought things above, set his mind on things above, he fulfilled the law. But for our sake he was treated as someone who *failed* to seek what is above, and to set his mind on things above, so that by his death, burial and resurrection, we might be counted as *righteous before God*. When he was raised, our justification, sanctification, and glorification were all assured by Christ. So, we are safe with Christ in God. This is good news!

1. **Make a List.** List your identities and rank them in order of their importance to you. How could the Gospel be applied to each identity? How would the Lord re-rank them?
2. **Give.** Give something [material, talent, time] away this week that takes your focus off of Christ. Instead of engaging with a distraction, pray.
3. **Memorize.** Memorize Colossians 3:1-4. Post it somewhere in your home.
4. **Read.** Read Richard Chin's Book [*Captivated by Christ*](#) with a few people in your Life Group.

5. **Calendar.** Schedule 30-45 minutes each day to read your Bible and pray. Instead of just checking the box: ask the Lord to increase your delight *in Him*. Focus on Jesus in your reading.
6. **Teach.** Teach some of the concepts in this text to your kids. Play hide and seek and explain how our true lives are invisible to us, but will be visible one day. Hide in a particularly hard spot and explain that the tension we feel when we can't find a person is a lot like when we can't see Christ right away. Even in the hard times, we can be assured that we *will* see him.
7. **Purge.** Sift through your possessions. Ask "Does this matter to Jesus? Or, just to me?" Give or throw away things that are distracting.
8. **Plan and re-prioritize.** If you knew the date of Jesus' return, or the end-point of your life, what would take up time in your near-term schedule?
9. **Pray and share the Gospel** with someone using this resource.
<https://twowaystolive.com/>
10. **Think Deeply.** Watch Tim Keller and John Piper discuss [the nature of sanctification](#).

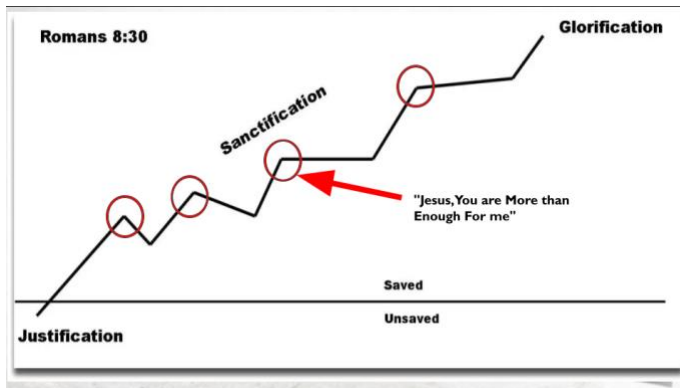
Why are we so inclined toward distractions? How can this happen? I think the answer has something to do the cross pressures that assail our identity.

For example, by my count I have at least ten identities: I am a

1. Human Being
2. Christian
3. Husband
4. Father
5. Son
6. Brother (friend)
7. Pastor
8. Citizen of the US
9. Suburbanite (i.e. home owner, pet owner, car owner, etc.)
10. Student

I would argue that we grow *distracted* because we can't keep our desires or our identities in proper order in relation to Christ. For me to grow in Christ, the Gospel must be applied to all ten of my competing identities. Everything must be seen in relationship to the single *focal point*. If you have to balance all these

identities, you can see why it might feel necessary to make rules and regulations to keep yourself in order! Sin splits our identities and disorders our priorities.



Why is the human heart so *inclined* toward stagnation? The answer is: We get distracted by multiple *focal points*. We lose track of ultimate, eternal goals. We age. We grow accustomed to our shortcomings. We leave problems unaddressed. We settle into our self-knowledge, and we begin to repudiate change. We fall into ruts.

We begin to make it about us. In short, we get our eyes off of Jesus.

Illustration: My wife Lauren has planted sunflowers for the past two years in our backyard. They are now over 10 ft. tall. Imagine one day if I walked out into the backyard and said, "Lauren, why isn't this sunflower growing?" She would respond, "It is." "Oh," I might say, "I can't see it." *Precisely*. Our Christian growth cannot be measured in daily metrics, experiences, or moments but over a lifetime. In fact, in most cases, we cannot *see* it. The human tendency to measure things can only give an account for what's happening on the human plane. So, when it comes to spiritual growth (i.e. how much is your soul being stretched right now?), we can't answer those questions, except through the revealed word of God.

The ultimate answer to this "Why?" questions are found just inside the gates of the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, Eve took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge good and evil, which Adam had been commanded not to eat from "...and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). Later, God's curse is grounded on the fact that "...You[Adam] listened to the voice of your wife...", implying that Adam had *failed* to listen to the one voice that truly mattered: God's voice. His gaze was distracted. He failed to stay focused. He took on two focal points: obedience to God and Eve. Jesus shows us a better way than Adam.

John Piper writes that sin is to fail to recognize the centrality of God to our identity. He says that sin is,

- The glory of God not honored.

- The holiness of God not revered.
- The greatness of God not admired.
- The power of God not praised.
- The truth of God not sought.
- The wisdom of God not esteemed.
- The beauty of God not treasured.
- The goodness of God not savored.
- The faithfulness of God not trusted.
- The promises of God not believed.
- The commandments of God not obeyed.
- The justice of God not respected.
- The wrath of God not feared.
- The grace of God not cherished.
- The presence of God not prized.
- The person of God not loved.

The answers to the *why* questions of our rule making, the pressures of our responsibilities and identities reveal that our hearts are 'idols factories.'

Why is the human heart so *inclined* toward stagnation? The answer is: We get distracted by multiple *focal points*. We lose track of ultimate, eternal goals. We age. We grow accustomed to our shortcomings. We leave problems unaddressed. We settle into our self-knowledge, and we begin to repudiate change. We fall into ruts. We begin to make it about us. In short, we get our eyes off of Jesus.

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