

October 12th, 2025 Sermon

Scripture Intro:

Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something.

You might be familiar with that line from the classic “The Princess Bride”. It’s heavy answer to a heavy question: What *is* life?

You might not think that the answer is pain, but it might be harder to give an answer than you’d like. Or maybe you agree: life is nothing but pain followed by disappointment.

We all have an answer to the question, whether we know it or not, because we all live. We make choices, we decide what’s important, we choose to do some things, and avoid others. Even doing nothing is a choice, and likely not a very good one. So, what is life? What is it about, and who is it for?

Well, I’m not selling anything, but I would like to suggest an alternative. Actually, it is Paul, an early apostle sent out by Jesus who will address the question. And if you’ve joined us over the last few weeks, or have read a few of Paul’s letters in the Bible, you might be able to guess his answer.

Paul will tell us that life is Jesus. Not just that Jesus makes life better, but that Jesus *is* our life. Now, what does that actually mean? Let’s take a look together at Colossians 3.

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-17

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, God’s wrath is coming upon the disobedient, ⁷and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. ⁸But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. ¹¹In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

¹²Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to

forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Sermon: It's time for new clothes

Look up, put off, put on. If you had to summarise Paul's words in three little phrases it would be "Look up, put off, put on."

Have you ever been walking and run into someone who is so engrossed looking down at their phone that they run into you, or you have to jump out of the way to avoid them? Or (for those of us who are a bit taller), been watching where you were walking ground, and ended up hitting your head instead?

We can get so caught up on where we're going, and what we're doing that we forget to look up. Where we point our eyes is where our focus will be. What we look at becomes what we think about and what feels important to us. That's true of our physical choices to look or not look at things, but it's also true of our minds.

Paul says to "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" because he knows how easily our focus shifts. Life becomes pain. Or pleasure. Or disappointment. Or meaningless. Why? Because of what we're looking at.

What we choose to look at doesn't change what's going on around us, but it does change how we see and experience what is going on. We can live our lives choosing to be blind to the truth all around us, or we can look up and see what is really going on.

We were chatting this week in bible study about the stunning beauty of nature. It's easier than it should be to never see a sunrise or sunset. There are screens to look at, and curtains to close, and work to be done. But when you take the time to look up, it's hard not to be moved by the beauty. We've had some incredible clear nights recently, and one of the joys of living out in the middle of nowhere is starry nights that leave you in awe of the God who created them.

Our world reflects the God who made it. If we take a moment to look, he has given us more reminders than we can count that there is much more going on than we tend to see looking down into our own little worlds that feel so big.

Most of what goes on in our minds is lower down. What will I wear, what will I eat, what did they post, what do they have that I don't. We look to things that give us cheap happiness, or

make us angry, or make us want things we shouldn't. Things that tomorrow we won't even remember. Because it's easier to look down than it is to look up.

It takes effort to lift our thoughts up. But when we raise our thoughts, and actively seek after higher things, things change. Because Jesus shows us that we're living in a different reality than we realised. We thought that life was our work, or jolts of pleasure that leave us feeling empty, or pain. But it's meant to be so much more.

Maybe you've met someone who is a superfan of a band or a sports team. They know every name, they have the posters and the jerseys, and it seems that everything they do revolves around it. It's what they think about, and how they spend their time, and what they talk about. It becomes their identity.

For other people it's work. Your job becomes who you are. It becomes your whole life. Or maybe it's your kids. You're a dad, or a mom. It's what you've always wanted, and it's who you are more than anything else. It consumes your time, and it's hard to even have conversations with people who don't know what it's like.

Good and bad things can become our life. Some things are of course more or less damaging. But sometimes it is the good things that are harder to shift our focus from, because it's so easy to explain and justify why we don't have time to look up. But only one thing, only one person, is meant to be above everything else.

If we died with Christ, we are resurrected with him, and we are also raised with him. Jesus didn't just save our lives, he *becomes* our lives. But there's another step as well: the ascension—when Jesus was raised up to heaven after he rose from the dead—is easy to overlook because it seems strange. It might even seem like a step backward: if Jesus was here and could be with us, why would he go away?

Yet Jesus says that it is necessary. He needs to go and be with the Father, and we should actually rejoice that he does. He went and sent us the Holy Spirit, to help and empower us to do all that he commanded. Jesus' ascension is also the assurance that there will come a day when we will be raised as well. We will be with Jesus in glory.

Because what happens to Jesus isn't just an example. Over and over Paul says that we are *in* Christ. That he is our life. That what happens to him, in some way also happens to us. Because Jesus dies, we have also died to who we used to be. Because he was resurrected to new life, we also have new life. Because Jesus has been raised to be with God, so will we.

Our confidence isn't just that Jesus can give us these gifts, it is that *because* Jesus has made us parts of his body, our life is entirely in him. We can say that we *already* have things that, if you were to just look at our earthly lives, it doesn't seem we have, but *Jesus* has them. It's

only when we look up and see Jesus that we realise our own reality, because Jesus holds our lives, safe and hidden, in himself with God.

We keep important things in safe places. We hide and protect them. There is no safer place to keep something than in Jesus, with God. If that's where our lives are hidden, then we can be sure we are secure. That's why Paul can write in Romans:

"Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When we follow Jesus, we need to look up, and then we need to put off some things. There are ways of thinking, acting, and speaking that can only drag us away from Jesus, or cause us to lose our focus on him. When Paul says, "put to death what belongs to your earthly nature." He is not saying that everything on this earth is bad. God made the world, and our physical bodies, and he made them to be good.

Paul is saying some things need to be totally removed from our life, because they drag our attention away from Jesus. They are idolatry, because we put our hope, and trust, and desire in someone or something that is not God. "Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry" are examples on Paul's list. Desire is not wrong. Sex is not wrong. Care for our finances is not wrong.

What is wrong is when we twist those good gifts God has given, and make them selfish. We fight for the things we desire, and step over others to get them, or we want the wrong things in the first place. We don't value God's gift of sex as a unique bond to unify a marriage, and misuse others for our own pleasure. Money becomes a tool to get what we want, instead of a gift to love God and one another. When our focus slips down, we forget why God gave these gifts in the first place. We need to look up, and put off these damaging actions.

The problem goes deeper as well. Most of us know we should try and avoid that list, but the next examples Paul gives leave us feeling a bit exposed. "Put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth [and] do not lie to one another." Does anyone else struggle with these?

Words come and go so easily from our lips, but they leave lasting scars. If you don't believe that words have power, go back to the first lines of the bible, where God *speaks* all of creation into existence. Each one of us has been hurt by words that still sting today, even though years have passed. Words shouted in anger. Or maliciously whispered behind our

backs to slander. Disgusting language hurled at us to degrade or drag us down: making us an object instead of a person. Lies that broke apart families and friendships, that tore apart churches.

As people who follow Jesus, we need to throw away all of that. We need to remove it from how we think and speak, because words are so easy to say, and impossible to take back. Words have power, and we need to be good custodians of that power. It's interesting that it is at this point that Paul reminds us, "since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator."

When we start to put off the thoughts, actions, and words that drag us and others down, we are beginning to live the kind of life that Jesus calls us to. None of these things are a part of Jesus' life: not when he was on earth, and not now that he is lifted up with God. Our life is not just connected to Jesus, or helped out by Jesus, it *is* Jesus. Jesus renews us and gives us new life—a new self even. The old is gone, and the new has come, but we need to take hold of that gift.

The final step that Paul lays out is for us to "put on". Lift up, put off, put on. Day to day, even hour to hour, this is our model. We are constantly being distracted. Constantly being tempted. And so, we must constantly be lifting up our eyes to Jesus, putting off our old nature, and putting on the nature of Jesus.

We had a beautiful look at Jesus' nature and his attitude last week in Philippians, and Paul shares more of what that looks like in practice in our lives today.

"As God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.

Do you notice that these same attitudes come up again? What does it mean to think and act like Jesus? To be compassionate. To be kind. To be humble and gentle. To be patient, sticking with people through their ups and downs, and forgiving one another when we make mistakes. These are not optional add-ons, they are the first things that we are to put on if our life really is in Jesus.

When the kids keep asking the same questions, or your coworkers make a mistake, or your friend disappoints you, how do you respond? It all depends on what we believe life is all about. If life is about my pleasure, or my pain, or my frustration, there's a good chance of anger, wrath, impatience, and unforgiveness. But if Jesus is what my life is about, those are replaced with the way that he would respond, because I know that is how he responds to me as well.

This is the surprising and powerful truth of who Jesus is. Humility, gentleness, and love are the center of what it means to live in Jesus. If Jesus is our life, then our lives must look like his. This is why Paul says,

“Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.

Not “also, if you have time put on love”, but *above all* put on love. Why? Because it is the perfect bond of unity. Life in Jesus means life unified to him, and to his people. We cannot truly live in Jesus and be separated from living in the way that he calls us to. Causing problems with one another and living in anger or unforgiveness are things that we need to put off, so that we can put on the love and unity of Jesus. Our hearts are meant to be “ruled” by the *peace* of Jesus.

Look up, put off, put on. So often, we try to skip one of the steps. We try to just make ourselves better with out looking to Jesus as the source of our lives. Or we try to follow Jesus, but refuse to put off the habits that we know are not from him. Or else, we look to Jesus, and get rid of some of the bad stuff, but we never really move to the final step of actually putting on the nature of Jesus.

Each step is necessary. We see both the big picture of the life of each Christian: finding our life in Jesus, turning away from our sin, and turning toward Jesus; and also our daily walk: looking to Jesus, putting off the old, and putting on the new.

Life in Jesus is wonderful, and it is secure, but it is not “safe” as we often think of the word. We need extra protection and safety when we do dangerous things like putting our sins to death, and forgiving people, and loving the broken. That’s why Jesus assures us that our lives hidden in him. We can be sure today, and at the end of our days, that we are totally secure in him, and that our life is not tied to this earthly body, but to the body of Jesus himself.

As we wait for that day, we are not called to ease, but to putting off, and putting on. We are new creations, but the old creation doesn’t know that yet. Life will have real trials, real temptations, real boredom, real joy, real unity, real peace, and yes, real pain. But our life is not any of those things.

Your life, and mine, if we have been raised with Christ, is Jesus Christ himself. It is in Jesus and through Jesus that we not only have life in the age to come, but here and now. Jesus is inviting us to live out this wonderful life together: looking up to him, putting off the old, and putting on the new. So that whatever we do, “in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Amen.