

Keep Seeking the Things Above

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[0:00] Okay, first off, there's a bit of business I'm going to need your help with. I've put it in my notes, but the odds are I will forget. At the end of the service, if I don't say anything about baptism, say, hey, John, what are we supposed to be doing next?

I won't be offended, and we don't want you wandering off and missing the opportunity to see people getting baptized this morning. But I have instructions for you that you won't remember if I give them to you now. Or you'll be so focused on, I've got to remember the baptism, that you missed the whole message.

And we don't want that to happen. So I don't know if you caught, as we were singing together this morning, there's a theme in the songs we sang, and that theme was freedom.

What I hope you gather from our look at Colossians chapter 3 this morning is the freedom that we have in Christ. There are some concepts that I alluded to last week, that whole idea of letting go and letting God.

Obviously, I'm not a fan of that phrase. But wrestling with what role does that have in our lives? What does it mean to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness while avoiding legalism?

[1:08] How does that work? And I think I've come, not to a new understanding, but a greater clarity that, as we pray together, pray for me, that I'll be clear in what I'm trying to convey and that you'll be able to receive what I'm saying.

Because it's really cool. What an understatement. It is breathtaking, the freedom that we have in Christ, and how that works itself out in our lives.

And I hope that you see that this morning as we go through Colossians 3. Now, I'm going to do an experiment today so I don't preach forever. In your bulletin is this little handout thing.

So at the very beginning of Colossians chapter 3, Paul says, Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ. So everything that follows is built upon that premise that you've been raised up with Christ.

Now, there's a principle in the Bible of self-examination. To look at ourselves. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Don't worry about pulling the speck out of your brother's eye before you've dealt with a plank in your eye.

[2:21] What's implicit in that is that you're looking at yourself. Paul said at the end of 2 Corinthians, To examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. He also said in the passage in 1 Corinthians 11, As we're taking the Lord's Supper, to examine yourself.

James said in chapter 1, Don't be merely hearers of the word, but be doers also. And how do we do that? We look in the mirror. We look at ourselves.

We examine ourselves. And so, this statement by Paul, If you've been raised up with Christ, is another opportunity to examine ourselves. And so what I've done, This is just basically a quick summary Of the sermon I did on Colossians 1, 22 and 23, About a month or so ago.

These are good things to think about. Am I raised with Christ? Am I in Christ? And to stop and to pause. And to think. There's a couple things I want to highlight here.

I'm not going to go recover this whole sermon. But there's two points I want to make, Really want to point out. The first one is, Have I believed in Jesus' work on the cross To save my sins?

[3:27] Of course. That's the fundamental question. Have I put my trust in Christ? But the second question under that point, Can I point to a specific time and place When I repented, believed, And decided to follow Jesus?

I want to clarify that for you. Some of you are like me. It was a Sunday evening, Seven o'clock, In my parents' living room, Reading a book on evangelism, That I made that choice.

I passed from the kingdom of darkness Into the kingdom of light. I accepted Jesus as my savior. I knew exactly where I was, What time it was, What was going through my mind. It's a crystal clear core memory for me.

But that's not true of everybody. Kara got saved when she was three or four years old. And she went through this cycle of, Maybe I am, Maybe I'm not.

Maybe I am, Maybe I'm not. Maybe I am, Maybe I'm not. And she couldn't tell you specifically If she got saved and came to faith in Christ As a little girl. Or if it was at one of those other periods of her life, Whether it was at a vacation Bible school Or at camp, That she heard the gospel again And finally it's cemented in her head.

[4 : 34] That might be you. That's okay. Then there's another case. I used to meet and pray with a guy That at the time seemed like he was really old, But he was only 62, So he was a lot younger than I thought at the time.

But we were talking about these issues, And he said, John, I have no idea where I came to Christ. I don't have a clue. I don't even know the decade. I just know That I know who my savior is.

I know that Jesus died on the cross for me. I know that the Holy Spirit lives within me And is changing my life day by day. When that began, I don't have a clue. That might be you.

That's okay. The fundamental question is, Have I believed in Jesus' work on the cross for me? So that's the first one. Identify that.

Answer that question. Be honest. It's only between you and God. And he knows the truth anyway, So tell the truth. Do I love God's people? In the first epistle of John, That is a key theme through those five chapters of that book.

[5 : 38] Is that the love of God is expressed in love for people. And if you don't love people, you don't love God. And I really wanted to challenge our thinking on that. Because we have diluted the meaning of the word love Down to a warm feeling.

Or nostalgia. Or kind of the feeling we get when we see a puppy. Oh, that's so cute. That's not love. Not even close.

Love is actually, from the biblical perspective, very practical. And I want to challenge you to examine yourself. Am I loving these people? And the people I encounter every day in a biblical manner.

And I'll tell you how you know. It's two things. Both of them are expansions of what it means to obey the command to love. In Leviticus, it says, Love your neighbor as yourself.

So you want to know how to love the people around you? Take a minute. Do this tomorrow morning. Get out of the shower. Wipe the steam off the mirror. Look in the mirror and say, Me? What makes me feel loved?

[6 : 44] What does somebody do that just makes me go, Man, that person gets me. They love me. Think about it. You know what? Go do that. Have the courage to go do that.

I'll tell you a weird way that our brains work. I like compliments. It's not me begging for compliments. Don't misunderstand. But I learned, because actually I went through a season of life where I thought that was, spoke less of my character.

But I thought about it. I prayed about it. No, this is okay. It's part of being made in the image of God. There's a place to appreciate people noticing when I do something well. But I felt weird about complimenting other people.

I don't know why. I had to get over that. So look at those things in your life that make you feel loved. That's the first one. The second one is a little harder.

Jesus said in John 13, 34 and 35, as I have loved you, so love one another. And how did Jesus demonstrate his love? Well, we know that from Romans 5, 8, by dying on the cross for our sins.

[7 : 51] 1 John 3, 16 says, we know what love is by this, that Christ died for us. This is the hard question, brothers and sisters. Do you sacrifice to love the people around you?

Do you? David said in one scene in the Old Testament, David said, I will not offer a sacrifice that costs me nothing. I think that's a legitimate question.

Or, oh, that's going to take some extra time. Not going to do it. That's going to cost me some extra money. Not going to do it. That's going to dip into my savings. Not going to do it. It's inconvenient. Not going to do it. It's between you and God. But if you habitually walk away from sacrifice, this is a hard word, brothers and sisters.

But I believe that what the New Testament tells you is if you are consistently not loving people well, if you're not loving people, you need to examine whether or not you've accepted Christ as your Savior.

[8:59] That's heavy. But it's necessary. I wouldn't be doing my job as one of your pastors if I didn't challenge you to examine yourself before God.

Now, am I saying you have to get it perfectly? Oh, heavens, no. I don't get it perfect. Not even close. Follow me around for a day and you'll think, is that guy even a believer? Who did we hire? What were these guys thinking when they offered John the job?

No, we don't get it perfectly. And you're going to see that we have freedom as we go through Colossians 3 today. But examine how you love people because that's an indicator that you are in Christ.

You can read the rest. Don't do it during the service. That's for homework for later. So let's pray together and then we're going to dig into Colossians 3. God, I am so grateful for the freedom that we have in Christ.

I thank you for the new identity that you have given us. God, we have died. Died. To our old nature.

[10:04] It's gone. We are new creatures in Christ. We have been born again. We're new people. Help us to sink deep into that truth.

To think deeply about the metaphor of being in Christ. Actually, that's not a metaphor. That's a reality. It's not a word picture. It's an expression of fact. God, help us to see and appreciate what it means.

Truly what it means to be in Christ. God, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Last week, actually I think it was two weeks ago, I talked about the idea of Selah, the pause to think.

And then last week I said we're going to do at the end of the sermon and I completely forgot. So we're going to make up for it. We're going to take a Selah moment, a pause. And I want you to take a second and look at what I wrote on the front side of that little handout.

It's the side that says, therefore, if you've been raised with Christ. And then read the back. I'm not going to give you a lot of time, but this is a pause. A Selah is a pause to reflect, to pray, and to listen to what God has to say to you.

[11:28] So take a minute to do that. Thank you.

Thank you.

But, you know, I complimented Paul and the way he structures his books. It's really easy to preach out of Paul's letters. This passage is the exception. The way it's woven together is that he does a series of loops.

So what we're going to do is the next, this week, and then Pastor Tim is preaching next week and the two weeks following that, what we're going to do is go through Colossians 3, 1 through 17 three times, looking at a different element of what Paul brings to light.

Because I think that'll make it easier than trying to make slices that overlap. So you're going to hear a lot of Colossians 3, 1 through 17. Therefore, if you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[13:17] 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 and God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience.

And in them you also once walked when you were living in them. But now you also put them all aside, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, since you have laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who has been renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.

A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free man. But Christ is all and in all.

[14:19] So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so

also should you.

Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. There's a lot there. So I already realized, Martha, I did forget to put a slide in. In just a minute, there's a slide that's the graphic of the disciplines. Looks like a Venn diagram. I'll need that in a minute. Thank you. I am hopeless by myself, just saying.

[15:30] And you go, really? We hadn't noticed. So we're going to talk to begin with. In this first segment of today's sermon, about what Paul is commanding in verses 1 and 2.

He says in verse 1, keep seeking the things above. In verse 2, he says, set your mind on the things above. We're going to start out by talking about what's the context?

What's the context in which we are to be seeking God? That we're to be setting our minds on the things of God? Where do we live? Now, you've heard me say many times.

You will hear me in the future say many times. These core principles. Life is hard. The gospel is greater than we can imagine. I realize there's a third one that weaves its way through my messages.

I just forgot to make it specific. So I'm going to rectify that. The context in which we're seeking God, the context in which we are setting our minds on the things above, is our life.

[16:31] And it is definitely true that life is hard. We've talked about that. I'm not going to beat that dead horse. But there's another thing that's true about us that I haven't been explicit enough about.

And that's the fact that in our context, part of our context is we're called people. We're called.

You've been given a purpose. And if you don't know that, I want you to start thinking along those lines and thinking about and asking God, what is my purpose?

For what reason have you put me here? Here, in the broadest sense, just as a living being on planet Earth, but much more refined than that, why am I where I'm at in my daily life with this particular family, with this particular neighborhood, this particular workplace, these particular hobbies?

Or even getting more granular or down to the fine print. Why am I at this place, at this moment in time? Who can I touch?

Is there a need that I can meet, an encouraging word that I can give? Can I bring Jesus into this place in which I find myself? You have been called for glorious purpose.

[17:55] Because your glorious purpose is to literally bring the kingdom of God into the places that you go. I used to tell our volunteers when we were in the Dominican Republic, where I first came up, we were going to work at a school in a town called Esperanza, Hope.

We're going to Esperanza, and I told our volunteers, you know, God is at work in Esperanza. And you know, I haven't even been there yet, but I know it's true.

Well, how do you know it's true? Because God is sending us, this team, to Esperanza. And the fact that we're going there to teach English and to bring the gospel is evidence that God is at work there. All we have to do is get in step with Him and listen and obey. That's true of every moment of your life. Your life is pregnant with purpose.

You just have to step into it. So the context in which we are seeking God is the hardships, the challenges, the difficulties, the confusing things of life. But it's also in the context of walking with God and living out our life, of being the light of the world, of being the salt of the earth, and showing to the world what it means to follow Jesus and what a life it is, and to invite them to come along.

[19:23] So our context, just to be clear, is all of life, with its challenges and with its rich purpose that you've been given by God. I want you to own that.

I want you to hold it with both hands. We were created with a desire for purpose. God knows that. He made us. And He's given us that purpose.

Now the next question is, how do we seek? I'm going to come back to the what we seek in the next major point, because that's kind of important.

But how do we seek? So this is where I need that graphic, Martha. So I talk often about disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness. I talk about it in private conversation.

I've talked about it through sermons. But the idea is that there's many disciplines. But these five are the big five that church fathers, Jesus Himself practiced through all of church history.

[20:23] These are the things that we see people doing. And it's all us working with the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus to glorify the Father.

You know these things. It's being in the Word. Read your Bibles daily. I would love to see you, if you're new to the Bible, read the Gospels.

Chapter a day. It's 89 chapters, so you get one day off in three months. Read the Gospels. And think about, Jesus, who are you? And what do you want me to be based on what I'm reading? But be in the Bible and think about, remember what I said? The James said, the Bible is a mirror. Don't be a hearer only. Be a doer.

Look in the mirror. Learn from it and change your behavior. But be a student of God's Word and a student from the perspective of application, not just filling your heads. The next one is prayer.

[21:23] We need to be people who pray. I want to challenge you, every one of you in your prayer life. We tend to put prayer into this very safe little box and pray so broadly that we can't tell if God's answered the prayer or not.

We pray these generic, spiritual-sounding things. Brothers and sisters, we need to pray specifically. And we need to know each other well enough to know what we should be praying for.

We should be using our creative minds, our sanctified imagination, to think, you know, I know that this couple has kids. What's it like to have kids?

Oh, I think I'm going to pray that they get a chance to get some extra sleep because parents of young kids never sleep. Oh, I'm going to pray for their marriage because parents of children have a hard time getting time together.

I'm going to pray for their walk with Jesus. You see what I'm doing there? You're using your observation of somebody else and translating your observation to think about it, to pull out of it, what are the things that this person probably needs?

[22:42] Thanks, guys. What are the things that these people probably need? And ask God to give them those things. Pray specifically. Pray boldly. Boldly.

Specifically. We prayed boldly and specifically for Trish Blaser. We do not see or celebrate enough the healing that she's experienced.

Now, we need to continue to pray for her. But we need to pray specifically for jobs, for marriages, for health. That God will either heal or provide or teach us through the circumstances that we're enduring.

But we have got to be people of prayer. Prayer is a primary context in which we wrestle with God. You've heard me talk about that before. Much of life is confusing.

We're just not very smart. Don't walk away from the questions. Take those questions to God.

[23:53] I don't understand. Why is this going the way it's going? Why did this thing that seems so obvious that I should do not work? Why did this fail? Because things fail.

When I was a youth pastor back in the early 2000s, we were crushing it as a youth group. Our youth group was way beyond the size that you'd expect for a church our size.

We were seeing kids get saved. We were seeing adults getting put to kingdom work. It was so much fun to see God working in the midst of this church through our youth group.

And I got fired. What? You cannot walk away from those things. You have to take them and say, God, I don't understand.

Help me to understand. That's prayer. So be people who pray. So we're in the Bible. We're praying. We're in community. And this, the rest of Colossians, all of chapter 3, all of chapter 4, is all about community.

[25:02] It's our faith lived out together. We cannot function alone. We will die. We will die. We have to be in community.

And I want to challenge you with that. I'm in a challenging mood this morning. Sorry. No, not really. I'm not really sorry. I want to challenge you to be very aggressive about meeting together.

You know, when Jesus said, love as I have loved you, the very first part of the definition of Jesus' type of love is initiative.

When did God demonstrate his love for us? While we were still sinners. While we were dead in trespasses and sins. He was helpless and rebellious. Then God intervened. He took initiative.

That's love. Pick somebody in this room and decide, I'm going to meet with that person this week, or at least I'm going to invite them. And if you're invited, don't say no.

[26:04] I'm too busy. I'm sorry. That dog won't hunt. Because every one of us has got things that we move everything else aside to do, make community a priority.

So take the initiative to set an appointment. And if you're invited out, say yes, I'll get together. It doesn't have to be something major. Just get together and get to know each other. Talk about your experience with the Lord.

And see what God does with that. But we've got to be spending time together. We have to. We cannot survive outside of community. We need to be a worshiping people.

We make the mistake of relegating worship to four songs on a Sunday morning, and then another song at the end of the service. Or, if we're a little bit more theologically minded, we say, no, no. Worship is actually from 9.30 to 11.30. No. No. Worship is life. Let your light so shine before men that they may glorify your Father.

[27:07] Our behavior, everything we do, should point people to God. That's worship. But worship has a very personal component. It's me consciously engaging and getting my heart involved in celebrating who Jesus is and who He is to me.

That's part of seeking God. Find good Christian music and listen to it. If you're a person who just loves getting out into nature, the heavens declare the glory of God, go celebrate in nature.

Celebrate in community. But we need to be offering ourselves to God in worship, lifting our hands up in praise to the God who's given us everything we have.

Everything. And as you worship God, He's involved in our worship. It says God inhabits our praises. That's literal. It's not a metaphor. That's literal.

As we're celebrating, God is communing with us and talking to us. And yeah, that's right. That is who I am. But let me show you a little bit more. Let me peel back the curtain a little bit further.

[28:12] That's what happens when we worship. So we're people of the Word. We're people of prayer. We're people of community. We're people of worship. And we're people on mission. That goes back to calling. Get off your butt and go serve God somewhere.

Now that doesn't mean a mission trip necessarily. It doesn't mean that God pulls up stakes and takes you to another country. It may be something as simple as saying to somebody, you know, you look really sad today. Are you okay? Even if you don't know them.

Exercise some courage. Or on the flip side, like you are bouncy. Either you had four cups of coffee or something's really good going on in your life. Tell me about it. I'd like to hear. Do you know people love to share that stuff?

They love it. And oftentimes that opens the door. If you'll just follow the thread that the Holy Spirit's given you, that opens a door for a spiritual conversation. Opens a door for a relationship.

And as you're on mission, you get to see God working. I'm going to give you a dramatic example. And I hesitate to give this because it was something very, very big in my life.

[29:21] I was in the Dominican Republic. It was our first mission trip. And we went to, we were going to do a vacation Bible school in this village.

And we get there and there weren't many kids, but there was like 20 adults. I'm like, well, what do we do with this? So we got the team together. We huddled.

And I said, well, the activities we planned aren't really appropriate for adults. I'll just give the, I'll give the gospel presentation. And we'll just see what happens. So I had this illustration from Romans 6.23.

I went through the gospel. I had a really good translator. It was translated in Spanish for me. And we finished and I invited people to respond and invite Christ in their life. Who would like to do that? And we can talk about it. Every one of them raised their hand. And I went, okay, I did something wrong. That just doesn't happen. I'm not an evangelist. So I turned to my translator, a guy named Danielle.

[30:18] I said, Danielle, let's do it again. Something didn't, I did something wrong. So I gave it again. Everybody says, I want to receive Jesus.

This is how dumb I am. Okay, I clearly didn't communicate well. So I turned to Danielle. I said, dude, you do gospel presentations probably more than I do. So why don't you just get me out of the way?

You give a gospel presentation. Let's see what happens. 21 people came to Christ that day. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4 that we carry this treasure in earthen vessels so the glory and the power is clearly from him and not from us.

That was a great example. You see God work in those ways but there's little things too, little touches. And then you find out later a comment in passing touched somebody's life.

But you have to be willing. We were on a bus in Seattle. I think I may have told you the story. We were on a bus in Seattle. I was standing up and this young woman is reading Tim Keller's book on marriage and I just asked her about it.

[31 : 38] Well, that led to a conversation that involved the middle third of the bus about Christian marriage. We had old veterans, Kara and I, this young woman who was single, the woman next to her who was Muslim, the old lady next to her who was 20 years older than Kara and I who was from Romania.

We had this international symposium on marriage. All I did was ask a question. God is setting you up. Be on mission. Look for opportunity to be on mission and step into it and watch what happens. It's really cool because you'll get to know God. You get to see God at work because if you really recognize that this is an earthen vessel with not much to offer and yet God still works miracles, it's clearly Him.

He's not just saying that to the people around you. He's saying that to you. And we want to get a hold of that. So we're seeking God. So we're going to pause.

Time for a Selah. I want you to look at this diagram. I want you to pray and I just want you to think. God, where do I need to seek you more?

[32 : 50] Is it in the challenges of my life? Am I just so busy with the grind I'm missing it? Am I missing you? Is it in the call that you've given me?

And then what am I doing to foster my heart and my mind being directed to you? Am I doing these things? What can I do better? How can I discipline myself to experience more of you?

So we'll take a few seconds and let you think about that. Thank you.

All right, we're back on track with the slides. So Matthew 6, verses 32 to 34.

This is two-thirds of the way through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is concluding a segment about where our hearts are. Are we seeking money?

[34 : 22] Are we trying to pad our nest here to make sure we've got all our worldly needs taken care of? And Jesus ends the section with this. For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, food, shelter, clothing.

We're obsessed with those things, whether it's just the basics, just having enough to eat in a given day, or enough to the right clothing for the weather, or a roof over our heads, or if we're just, we're Americans and we're seeking bigger and better and more.

For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. God knows you need Him. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Back to verse 33. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

So I'm going to ask you a question that you're going to think is pretty obvious. What's a kingdom? A lot of times we don't think about this stuff. What's a kingdom? An author whose insight I really value is Dallas Willard.

[35 : 31] He develops this idea quite extensively. First of all, before I give you the definition, it's important to note, Jesus talked about the kingdom of God more than He talked about anything else. The kingdom is really important.

And if we're lazy and we don't think about it much, what we think of is the kingdom of God is, oh, that's in heaven. That's what happens after I die or after Jesus returns. Nope.

It's right now. No, that's fine, Eddie. You're great. I love you, brother. The kingdom of God is now. We live in the kingdom of God.

The kingdom, any kingdom, is the range of influence of the ruler, of the one in charge. My kingdom is 2386 Maplewood Drive.

It's a contested rule. You should see Jesse going after it. Me and Jonah came to blows last night. But that's part of my kingdom.

[36 : 33] This is part of my kingdom. God has called me to be one of the leaders here. This is part of my kingdom. Your kingdom is your sphere of influence. Your family, your work, your home, and I would say your neighborhood, because you have influence there.

God's kingdom is everywhere that He has influence. Everywhere that He has control. What did Jesus say right before He left? All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth.

What did we read earlier in Colossians? He is the ruler of all things. It says in Hebrews chapter 2 that He is sovereign over all of creation.

We don't see Him completely exercising that rule yet. There's a purpose behind that. But the kingdom of God is everywhere where His rule is carried out.

And most certainly His kingdom is us. When I told my volunteers in the Dominican Republic, when you go into Esperanza, the kingdom of God has arrived.

[37 : 38] The kingdom of God is there. Several years ago, our youngest son and his wife got married. And there are elements of the wedding that were very well planned.

And there are elements of the wedding that were not very well planned. And a lot of the not very well planned was more of the stuff around the wedding ceremony. So we're getting married at 2 o'clock. We're doing the wedding ceremony.

We've got all this prep stuff in the morning. How are we supposed to get lunch? Or are we fasting? And who's setting up chairs? I mean, all kinds of little tacky-tack stuff. But why do I tell you about this?

Two of our family friends came to the wedding. Carla and Jubilee. From the minute they walked into the Airbnb that we were all sharing, the passage that came to mind was out of Psalm 16.

Where it says that, David says, I love your saints, your magnificent ones, in whom is all my delight.

And as I watched Carla and Jubilee walk in, they went through the room.

[38 : 54] We had a whole bunch of people who were connected to this wedding that don't know the Lord. And Jubilee and Carla over the next hour had significant conversations with every person there. It wasn't forced.

It was just who they are. And then we get to the wedding venue, and every time I turned around with a need, there were two angels. Carla and Jubilee right there.

How can I help? We bought lunch. We took care of this need. We took care of that need. Don't worry, this is taken care of. You can relax. You can focus on doing the ceremony. They were such a blessing.

They were such a relief to us. They were bringing the kingdom of God to that wedding venue. You could touch it and feel it. That's what we bring. And we are seeking, we are to think about the kingdom of God.

And ultimately, the kingdom of God isn't a place. It's a person. It's Jesus Christ. We've developed that pretty thoroughly over the last few weeks.

[39 : 58] Jesus is the answer to the question. Not a list of rules. My point about spiritual disciplines notwithstanding, it's a person.

We're seeking the kingdom of God by seeking this person, Jesus. I want to give you a series of quotes from books I've read over the years that I absolutely love that have been very convicting. And I want you to think about these.

So give me the first one. This is A.W. Tozer. This is at the beginning of his book, Knowledge of the Holy. Got to read this book. It's like 110 pages long.

If you can finish it in a year, you've done good because that man walked with God. And there is wisdom and depth in every page of his book. Eighth grade education, by the way.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Why is that true? Because my thinking about God affects everything else that I do in my life. Everything else is influenced by my understanding of who God is.

[41 : 02] So we need to make sure that our understanding about God is right and accurate. The next one, this is by Dallas Willard from his book, The Divine Conspiracy. I love this.

It is a great and important task to come to terms with what we really think when we think of God. That's back to that mirror analogy from James chapter one.

Because we think a lot of things about God that are just wrong. They're not accurate. And we need to evaluate that thinking biblically. And think, is this true? Is this right? Or is God much more than I realize?

Which is almost always the case. It is a great and important task to come to terms with what we really think when we think of God. And this last one is from John Calvin.

To seek God means in every part of Scripture, side note, the idea of seeking God with your whole heart is throughout the Bible.

[42:02] Genesis to Revelation. God is calling us to seek Him. He's inviting us closer. He's inviting us further in and closer to Him. And this, I think John Calvin really nailed it.

To seek God means in every part of Scripture to cast all our hopes on Him. Because that's how we experience Him in a very tangible way.

So when we're facing the challenges of life, when we're answering the call and stepping into obedience and going out to fulfill our calling, we have to do so dependent upon God to guide our steps, to show us the path, to give us the energy to get through, the wisdom, the power.

But as we do, we get to know God better. It's in that context that we're seeking the things above and we're thinking about God. Jesus, what would you do here? How would you have me behave?

What do I need to change? How would you bless this person if you were here? How would you face this trial if you were here? And so we're learning as we become more and more dependent upon God and as we put our hopes in Him, we get to know Him better.

[43:21] The definition of hope, I want you to get this in your mind and remember it and own it. Hope in the Bible is the confident expectation of the righteous.

The confident expectation of the righteous. What does that mean? That means that our hope is sure. It's not wishful thinking. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when.

And we focus our attention on the Lord Jesus. That's seeking the kingdom. And then Jesus wrapped it up in Matthew 6.33, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Words matter. It doesn't say seek first the kingdom of God and your righteousness. righteousness. It says seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Which we're going to develop here in the final third of my sermon this morning. We're to seek God and His righteousness. That's a critical thing to remember.

[44:25] We have received the righteousness of God in Him. It says that in 2 Corinthians 5.21. We have been imputed righteousness.

We've been declared righteous. That's what justification means. Because of Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus took the penalty that you deserve to pay and gave you the life that you were made to live.

We're to seek that righteousness. So that's what we're seeking. When Paul says, therefore, if you've been raised up 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.

That's what we're talking about. We're going to pause. I want you to think.

How am I seeking God? Where do I see God revealing Himself in a kind of tantalizing way and saying, come on, there's more to see.

[45:30] Come on. Come on. Don't be afraid. Come with me. Where am I seeing that and how am I responding to that invitation? Am I responding to that invitation? We're going to pause and think about that.

How am I seeking the kingdom of God? And what do I prize about Jesus? What do I value in Jesus that's calling me to keep going, to seek Him even more?

Because it never ends. That's Ephesians 2.7. We're going to spend all of eternity getting to know Him better. But how are you seeking God?

That's your question. Thank you.

Thank you.

[47:20] At the end of chapter 2, that these things have the appearance of wisdom and self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Rules don't change our behavior. It doesn't work. So that's one side. But then the other, you read through the rest of the book, there's a whole bunch of rules.

Stop doing this stuff. Do that stuff. Pray. Sing to each other. Love each other. Okay. Is it rules or no rules? Is it some rules, but they have to be?

This is confusing. What is Paul saying here? Oh, I can't wait to tell you. This is so cool. The theme of our singing this morning was freedom.

Freedom in Christ. That's what I want to show you this morning is freedom in Christ. Because that resolves the paradox between the section we did last week to 16 through 23 and three to the end of the chapter.

[48:33] It's awesome. So let's read this again. Therefore, if you have been raised up 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. Important point. Paul makes this point often. You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. We're going to see a visual representation of that in a very short time. When those who are being baptized go under the water, that's a picture of our death with Christ. When they come out of the water, it's a picture of new life. Totally different life than what died. It's a new life. 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. Remember we talked about that in chapter 1, the ta-da!

And we're presented by Jesus to the Father as holy, blameless, and without reproach. How is that even possible? I'm going to tell you. It's pretty cool. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

[49:41] Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead. To all these things. I'm not going to go past that. So here's the conundrum that I've dealt with my whole life. Is on the one hand, you heard me pretty well beat to death the idea of let go and let God.

Now that is, in various forms, a very common view of how our Christian life is supposed to be lived. It's a distortion of what it means to be under the grace of God.

I used to work at a camp out in Washington, and one of our member churches got a hold of this hyper-grace belief to such a degree that one week I had a speaker for a middle school camp who was a black belt in multiple martial arts disciplines.

His dad had been a disciple of Bruce Lee, and this guy had been well-trained. And he was talking about discipline. Great messages. I got a call from one of the elders from that church.

We don't want this guy teaching discipline to our kids. If that's what you're going to be teaching, we're going to pull our kids out of the camp. Oh, what? 1 Timothy 4, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

[50:52] Hello. So they went too far to let go of God. But they were overreacting to the other part of the problem. Because something I've wrestled with as a pastor and youth pastor for years is you just heard me wax eloquent about disciplining yourself for the purpose of godliness.

How does that not become legalism? And at its root, legalism is telling God, I got this. I'm going to do what needs to be done to be acceptable to you.

I'm going to take things into my own hands and make it work. And God just says, oh my goodness, you're just not getting it. You can't do that. It doesn't work. So how is this resolved?

Well, it's resolved in the fact that we've been born again. Listen to what Paul told us in chapter 1 was the mystery.

Remember we established that mystery, mystery about our lives, is what propels us either into false doctrine or to pursue God. Mystery.

[52:02] We don't know how things work. We're confused. Life doesn't make sense. And Paul, the latter half of chapter 1 says, the mystery has been unveiled. It's been exposed to the world.

And that mystery that has been released to all of us is Christ in you, the hope of glory. That's the answer to the Gnostics, to those who would deconstruct our faith.

It's Jesus, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Listen to what Jesus said to Nicodemus. John chapter 3, verse 3. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

You have to be born again. And Nicodemus says, I'm an old man. What are you talking about? My mom's dead. How am I supposed to be born again? I'm going to leave you hanging there with Nicodemus.

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Then listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Therefore, from now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh.

[53:16] Yet now we know him in this way no longer. Listen. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.

The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God. You're a new creature. In Christ. You've been born again.

And then lastly, in Colossians chapter 3. This is toward... Oh, no. Excuse me. Yeah, no, that's right. Colossians chapter 3, verse 12. So that as those who have been chosen of God, each of you have been chosen by God.

You may think, I am unworthy. I'm unlovable. I'm worthless. I've made mistakes. You don't know what I've done. God says, stop talking. Shut up. I love you.

I chose you. You're my child. Listen. I love you. Therefore...

[54 : 21] Whoops. Wrong one. So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved. Holy is righteous. So it's that imputed righteousness we talked about, that we've been given the righteousness of Christ.

We are holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Now I haven't resolved the conflict yet. Here's a resolution of the conflict.

We have a new identity in Christ. We are a new person. I have heard this language for years, of new identity in Christ. And frankly, it sounded a little bit touchy-feely and psychobabish to me. And so I didn't pay it a whole lot of attention. But as I thought about it this week, this is the answer. We have a new identity in Christ. And this idea that we're going to explore in two weeks and three weeks from now, is this taking off and putting on, is learning to walk in our new identity. It's learning to walk out who we are in Christ. It's allowing Him to live and work and speak in and through us. It's stepping into a new identity.

[55 : 31] It's like really anything that we learn to do, this may freak you out, but occasionally you may see my car weaving its way down Maplewood Drive.

That's because I'm letting Sonny or Jonah drive. Don't worry, I'm behind the wheel. But they're terrible drivers. Not a big surprise, they're five and six.

But over time, you get to the point where, probably this is the best thing, but you can multitask and drive and be perfectly safe. Mostly safe.

Because it's become muscle memory, you know how to do it. That's the experience that we're having in Christ, is that we are learning to live out this new identity and to walk away from the old identity.

You see it pictured in Paul's lament in Romans chapter seven. I'm doing the things I don't want to do and I'm not doing the things that I do want to do. What's wrong with me? He hasn't been fully formed in his identity in Christ.

[56 : 33] You see that in Philippians chapter three. I press on for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I haven't attained it yet, but I'm pressing on because we're being remade in the image of God.

We're experiencing and living out new identity. And how do we do that? Now discipline has a place, but it's not to earn God's favor. It's not to secure that identity.

We already have it. We are in Christ. But because we're in Christ, we discipline ourselves. We do these practices to get better at it.

To familiarize our ear to the voice of God. To recognize His direction. Do you see how freeing that is? You are a new person in Christ.

You're going to sin. Guaranteed. You didn't stop. That guy's dead. God, I'm sorry.

[57 : 38] I admit it. I acted out of my own nature. I want to act out of my new nature. I am a new person in Christ. And we step into it. And we live it.

Martha, can you give me that last slide of the picture? Should be a picture of a guy.

Is it not cooperating? I'll describe it for you. So I've got this statue on my desk of a man struggling. He's obviously struggling. And the upper half of his body is made out of a crystal.

It's pure. And the lower half of his body is bronze. Not pure. And it's everything about this man in the sculpture is struggle. Is trying to work through transformation.

I've really struggled. I had Kara get me that as a birthday or Christmas present years ago. And then I went through a season where I thought, this isn't a good description of the Christian life. Now I'm back to thinking, no, this is the Christian life.

[58 : 41] It isn't easy. It's a process. As we face the challenges of life, as we face the fact that life is hard, as we face the reality that as we live out our calling, it ain't easy.

It takes courage. We will get called names. We'll meet opposition. People will resist the gospel. These things are true. It's a struggle.

But transformation takes place. And it's stepping into more and more and more every day. Our identity in Christ. Striving together to become more like Jesus every day.

That's what we're about. That's the second half of our mission statement. This new life, this is what I want you to leave with this morning.

You have been born again if you were in Christ. You are a new creature in Christ. And you are becoming that creature.

[59 : 45] You are stepping into it. There's a sense of already but not yet. But every day, you can move incrementally closer and closer and closer as you seek God to be more like Him.

And those old things start to become less and less and you become more and more like Jesus. And you're transformed. And maybe somebody who hasn't seen you for years gets in a conversation with you and says, wow, you've changed.

And it's a good thing because you're entering into that identity in Christ. That is the core of the message of Colossians is our new identity in Jesus.

The old man is dead. And we've been brought into new life. So as we wrap up, as we have our closing song, I want you to think about Colossians 3.12.

The implications of being chosen of God, of being holy, of being beloved. How would I live differently if I started believing what the Bible says is true of me?

[60 : 58] We want to seek God and the kingdom, the things above. We want to become more like Jesus and we want to live out our new identity. That's it in a nutshell. So let me pray.

And I didn't forget baptism instruction in large letters. I'm going to give you that here in a second too. God, thank you that we have a new identity in Jesus. that you take the man or woman that each of us is and you've allowed us to become born again.

And you're remaking us in the image of Christ so that we're living out your life through the lens of our life. God, help us to understand how to respond to the challenges of life, how to answer the call to live it out for your glory.

God, help us to just find joy and the wonder of relationship with you that comes from that. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.