During the Great Depression, an impoverished widow stepped into the foyer of an insurance company. An agent asked if he could help her. "Yes," she replied. Taking out a yellowed, weathered insurance policy, she said, "I've lost my job and can't keep paying this. What happens if I let it expire?"

The agent examined the document and said, "This is a valuable life insurance policy. I urge you not to let it lapse. What does your husband think?" "He died two years ago," she answered. The agent looked again—the document was a policy on his life. For two years his widow had been paying premiums when she should have been collecting them.

Paul has been telling the Colossians that they can experience all of God there is—not just a God confined to church or "religion." He would say the same to us. Rather than pay religious dues each Sunday, we can experience life-transforming joy each day.

Now the apostle turns from the theological to the ethical, from the theoretical to the practical. What does all this mean in the most common-sense terms? What steps are we to take to experience all of God there is today? What we'll learn this morning is so simple each of us can all do it, and so crucial each of us must.

Learn the facts
Paul begins with some foundational facts. First, you have been "raised" with Jesus, "co-raised" in the Greek.

The tense indicates an event completed in the past which bears present applications. If I tell you that "I have been married to Janet," I make the same point. The event happened 25 years ago, but it still affects my life in wonderful ways today.

This is passive, something that happened to us which we did not earn or deserve. It occurred at the moment of our salvation. In that event we became the "new creation" of God (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Second, "you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). "You" is plural, something which is true of every believer, no matter our past or present circumstances. "Died" is a past event, a completed action. It happened when you asked Christ into your life—the old person died, and you were "born again."

Now you are "hidden with Christ in God." The tense again indicates a past, completed event. We are now sheltered in Jesus, hidden from our enemies; we are personally and privately with him, where none can go; we are identified with him, so that others see him in us.
Third, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (v. 4).

Now Jesus "is your life," not just your faith or your religion. He will "appear" when he returns, and we will "appear with him in glory." This world will pass away, and we will spend eternity with our Father in his perfect paradise.

Past: you died to your old life when you invited Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, and you have been raised to new life with him. This happened at your salvation. Future: you will be glorified with him one day when he returns. Present: he "is your life" now. Not just your church or your religion--your life.

Do you experience these facts every day? Is the sinful person you were before you met Christ now dead and gone? When people see you, do they see Jesus instead? Is he your life all the time, every day in every way? If not, let's keep talking.

Make the choice

We've seen the grammatical "indicatives"--the statements of fact. Now let's turn to the "imperatives"--the commands of Scripture which result.

We are ordered by God to "set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (v. 1). "Set your hearts" translates the Greek word "seek." It is in the present tense--something we must do continually. We did not settle this once and for all at our salvation. We choose it every day.

The word translated "seek" describes a person who seeks diligently, passionately, the way a man dying of thirst seeks water. We are to value them above all else.

In the next verse he tells us to "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (v. 2). "Set your minds" means to fix your attention constantly, to think about these things all the time. We are to value and think about these things above all else.

The imperatives show that this will not happen unless we choose to make it so. This is not the inevitable consequence of a salvation experience, or God would not ask us to do it.

We are to set our minds and thoughts on "those things which are above." We are to think about them constantly, to value them above all else. What are these "things"?

God himself: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5); "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

His word and will: "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times" (Psalm 119:20); "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (v. 97); "I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly" (v. 167).

His daily worship: "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: 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 seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4); "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:1-2).

Ultimately: Jesus himself. We are to seek those things which are above because that's where "Christ is seated at the right hand of God." We are to seek to know and value him above all things, people, and priorities. We are to live for him first and always, practicing his presence all through the day.
By contrast, we are not to set our thoughts and hearts on "earthly things." What does Scripture mean?

**Popularity before obedience to God:** "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10).

**Worldly success as an end in itself.** Remember Jesus' parable of the rich man who tore down his barns to build bigger and said to himself, "Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." His response: "But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20-21).

Paul does not say that we can ignore people and possessions. He says that we are not to "set our minds" on them. They are not to come first. We are not to live for them, or evaluate our success by them. We are not to give them our minds and thoughts, our purposes or values. They are a temporal means to an eternal end.

Why does God care so much about our values and thoughts? Because "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

Marcus Aurelius was right: the happiness of our lives depends on the quality of our thoughts. What we think about and value, we become.

Norman Vincent Peale: "All successful people have a goal. No one can get anywhere unless he knows where he wants to go and what he wants to be or do."

"Omega point thinking" is more popular than ever--beginning with the end in mind. Where do you want to go? What do you want the organization to do? Not, how I can make the present better, but, what do we want to become? Then every step goes in that direction.

If we seek to know God, his word and his worship, we will. If we think about him through the day, we will be drawn to him. If we value him above all others, we will experience all of God there is. Our minds connect our souls to his Spirit.

**Take the steps to joy**

Now, what are we to do with all this?

First, **decide to live for God's glory.** Decide to ask of every decision: how will this honor Jesus? How will this draw me closer to him? How will this build his Kingdom? Decide to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, knowing that all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

Second, **begin tomorrow morning with him.** Make an appointment with your Father, and refuse to break it. Expect the enemy to intrude with distractions. Learn that the good is the enemy of the best. The most important thing you can do in the morning is to get with God. Even if you will dedicate only 10 minutes, start there.

Read a passage, and ask God to speak from it to you. Spend a few moments praying through your day, surrendering it to him.

Get a small notebook you can carry with you through the day. Find a verse you will think about through the day, and write it down. Make a prayer list, and work through it with your Father. Then spend a moment singing a hymn or chorus to him. Connect your soul with his Spirit.
Third, *walk through the day with him*. Pray for the people you meet. Pray about the tasks you must accomplish. Pray about the problems you face, and the opportunities you receive. Spend the day talking with your Father as your friend.

Last, *end the day with him*. Take a few moments before you go to bed to review the day with your Lord. Ask him for anything you need to change or learn. Write in your notebook anything he says to you. Thank your Father for what he has done for and with you this day.

These steps are so simple that anyone can take them, and so crucial that all of us must. They are the practical keys to experiencing all of God there is.

Next week we'll look at the specific results of this commitment to give God our minds and values. For today, let's make it. Assume that the enemy will distract you and tempt you. Assume that you'll easily forget to do this, or that you'll decide it doesn't matter. If right now you're hearing such words, guess why?

**Conclusion**

I was working on this message last Monday morning at the SMU library, and hit a wall. I had finished the exegesis of the text, and was working on the outline. But I didn't know where to go with it.

So I stopped for a moment to pray. I gave the message to Jesus, and asked him to put into my mind the direction he intended me to go. When I looked up, my eyes fell on the card placed at the center of the library work table.

On the right side was this stern warning: "No cell phones (tones or talking) in the library." That didn't help much. But on the left was a picture of Laurel (or Hardy, I never know which) and this wise quotation: "Day after day man invents machines and devices that increase noise and distract humanity from the essence of life, contemplation, meditation" (Jean Arp, 1887-1948). Wonder what he would say today?

But isn't he right? In that moment I knew that the message was to be about contemplation, meditation, practicing the presence of Jesus, our souls connected with his Spirit.

The quote carried me back to my best days with Jesus, those days when I was not so hurried and hassled by the world and its demands. Those days when I walked more slowly with him, conversing with him in my spirit, considering his word, practicing his presence. Those were my best days. I resolve to make them my future days.

Will you join me?