

## Colossians 3:1-17

### He Is Your Life

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from *his* perspective.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your *real* life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. *He* is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.

Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good

common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

**Leading From Within**  
**Colossians 3:1-17**  
**Annual Conference 2015**

I. William Stafford once wrote:

*There's a thread that you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about that thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

Throughout the journey of life there are any number of threads that we follow. As Stafford's poem suggests, those threads are the constants in our life that we can count on in the midst of ongoing change. You could say that love of family might be one of those threads. And, if you pushed a bit further you could say that "the way that I'm wired" is a thread – my DNA if you will. Our leadership style is another thread and, because we are a gathering of believers, we quickly admit that our faith is one of those threads we hold onto.

As Stafford's poem suggests, tragedies happen, people get hurt or die, you suffer and get old but in the midst of it all, you continue to hold on to the thread of who you are, what you value, and how you live out those values.

- II. What Stafford's poem doesn't acknowledge is that throughout the journey of life, we not only have to hold on to the thread, we have to work to strengthen it as well. You can say that love of family is a thread you hold onto in the midst of change, but if you don't nurture your family and make it a priority you can be sure that the thread will get weak, tattered, and eventually fall apart.

If we lean too much on the phrase, "that's the way I'm wired," we can very easily get locked into a rigid approach to changing times and never be open to using the security of the foundation of who we are to explore new horizons and adapt to changing times.

If, as a leader, we don't stay current with emerging trends and adapt our leadership to the context out of which we are leading, our leadership will quickly become irrelevant and out of touch.

Over the past several years, there has been quite a lot of work done around leadership development within the church. We have taken the lead from books like Good to Great and Death by Meeting. We've explored how people lead in successful businesses and have wondered how folks like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs have done it. Even within the church we look off at a distance and see people like Mike Slaughter and Adam Hamilton who are leading these massive church movements in our denomination and send people there to inquire about leadership models.

III. Yet in the midst of wondering how we can move from “Good to Great,” there is a thread that we hold in our hands that is the key to being an effective leader within the church. It is the thread of faith. Any one of us can look to a model for how to go from “good” to “great,” but the best leaders in God’s church are those who *“lead from within.”*

Noted church author Gordon MacDonald writes:

*“The forming of the soul that it might be a dwelling place for God is the primary work of the Christian leader. This is not an add-on, an option, or a third-level priority. Without this core activity, one almost guarantees that he/she will not last in leadership for a life-time or that what work is accomplished will become less and less reflective of God’s honor and God’s purposes.”*

IV. There once was a farmer whose barns were full of corn who used to pray that poor would be supplied. Yet, whenever anyone asked for corn, the farmer replied that he had none to spare.

One day, after hearing his father pray for the needy, his little son said, *“Daddy, I wish I had your corn.”*

*“What would you do with it?”* asked the Father.

*“I would answer your prayer,”* said the Son.

- The forming of our soul is that which takes any secular model of leadership and applies it to our service in the church.
- The forming of our soul is that which takes our good intentions and converts them into loving actions that bless those around us and form disciples that join us on the journey.

- The forming of our soul is that which gives us the courage to empty out our grain so that others might be fed. Without it we run the risk of hoarding our faith, keeping it to ourselves, and, as a result, lessening our faith rather than growing it for the glory of God.

V. When Paul wrote to the Colossian Church, he put it this way,

*So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around. Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*

Paul knew that being a leader in the church required putting aside the things of the world and assuming a new posture, taking a different stand, and holding onto a thread that connected the believer with Jesus. Paul knew all too well how easy it was to lean on the securities of this world and not cling tightly to the thread of faith. He knew how tempting it was to be both in the world and of the world.

He wrote to the leaders:

*Kill off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God.*

*It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk. Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life.*

*It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe.*

A leader that leads from within takes their lead from Christ and nurtures a relationship with Christ that strengthens the thread of faith and constantly acknowledges that this relationship with Jesus is a new way of living and a new way of leading.

Paul wrote,

*Dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

*Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.*

The threads of those garments are the essence of what leadership in the church depends on and needs.

- VI. During the course of any year, I have the privilege of being exposed to the glorious work of our church and its saints on all levels of the church's life and work. I see spiritual leaders who live out of a deep and abiding relationship with Christ. They are the ones who demonstrate their faith by singing like David in Psalm 84:

*How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!  
My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord;  
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God, . . .  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
They are ever praising you.*

And, during the course of any year, I also encounter those within the church who do not demonstrate that joy and spiritual centeredness. It is evident that the thread they are holding onto is one that is connected with self, ego, insecurity, and fear. It is a thread that, when grasped, will begin to tug you into a world that is filled with cynicism and anger.

I don't know what kind of leader you are today or what category you find yourself. But I do know that we live in a world that has a deep hunger for things that matter and a sincere longing that those who claim they are spiritual leaders will demonstrate that leadership in a manner that reflects the goodness, hope, love and grace that we so freely claim as our own.

And I do know that there are plenty of vulnerable people both inside and outside the church. I know that those people long to follow leaders and, as history demonstrates, they will follow poor leaders as easily as they will follow good ones.

It is so very important, dear friends, that we examine our leadership and, more importantly, examine the depth of our relationship with Jesus, the one who can inform and bless our leading like no other. There are potential disciples and young followers of the faith who are looking for the inspiration and witness that only a Christ-led leader can provide.

William Ayot once wrote a poem entitled, A Word from the Led. It goes like this:

*And in the end we follow them –  
not because we are paid,  
not because we might see some advantage,  
not because of the things they have accomplished,  
not even because of the dreams they dream  
but simply because of who they are:  
the man, the woman, the leader, the boss  
standing up there when the wave hits the rock,  
passing out faith and confidence like life jackets,  
knowing the currents, holding the doubts,  
imaging the delights and terrors of every landfall:  
captain, pirate, and parent by turns,  
the bearer of our countless hopes and expectations.  
We give them our trust. We give them our effort.  
What we ask in return is that they stay true.*

That is the mark of our person that leads from within.

VII. When the famous writer, teacher, and spiritual director Henri Nouwen met Mother Teresa for the first time, Nouwen says that he noticed immediately that her inner attention was focused constantly on Jesus. It seemed that she saw only him and through him she came to see the world in a different light and with him she gave all she had to others. Many people thought Mother Teresa was a naïve, simplistic, out of touch old woman.

When Nouwen met her and explained all of his problems and struggles in elaborate detail, and then asked for his insights, she said, “*Henri, if you spend on hour a day in contemplative prayer and never do anything which you know is wrong, you will be alright.*”

Nouwen later wrote, *“With these words she answered NONE as well as ALL of my problems at the same time. It was now up to me to be willing to move to the place where that answer could be heard.”*

Reflecting further on that day, Nouwen later wrote, *“The goal of education and formation for the ministry is continually to recognize the Lord’s voice, his face, and his touch in every person we meet.”*

Hey Leaders! *Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around. Christ—that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.*

Hey Leaders! A woman by the name of Helen Lemmel once wrote these words:

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There’s light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free!*

*His Word shall not fail you—He promised;  
Believe Him, and all will be well:  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell!*

She ends these words with this chorus:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,*

*In the light of His glory and grace.*

That's the way you Lead from within.

Amen.