

Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV) ¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have 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.

It is good, healthy, and right to ponder eternity. Specifically, I mean it is good to spend time thinking about heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. The Bible says,

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This week I found myself thinking about two earthly things too much. The governor's race in New Jersey was too close to call. I kept checking the news for most of the day hoping to discover who won the race. I also read that Aaron Rogers, my second favorite quarterback, second only to Russel Wilson, has covid and will not be playing this weekend. That is big news. Without Rogers, what will their playing be like? I found myself thinking about the Green Bay Packers and the governor's race in New Jersey. I even called a parishioner and spoke to him about these two issues. That phone call took time. My thoughts were stuck on those two things. **1. We pick what we think about. We choose where we spend our mental time.**

The Bible says, *¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* These verses are speaking only to Christians. Paul is telling us where to daily put our thoughts, set our thoughts upon, seek diligently, and put to diligent work that muscle between the ears. Deliberately think about Jesus fully seated at the right hand of God.

Friends, sometimes our brains get stuck. I can think about the governor's race all day long and not give God one thought. The Packers, my 2nd favorite football team, 2nd to the

Seattle Seahawks, can be on my mind more than they ought to be. We pick what we think about. We choose where we spend our mental time.

2. Your quality of life is determined by what you know about God. The best way to know about God is to set your mind on God, set your sights on God, and seek God every day. It is to think more about God than the things of this earth. Everything there is to know about God will only build you up. Everything you will ever learn about God will give to you a greater quality of life. I could know all that there is about the Packers and the Seahawks. I could know who won the governor's race but none of that increases the quality of my life. God asks of us to seek Him first, more than and beyond anything else. When we do this, most of life's problems fall into their own accord, into their own place. We see the bigger picture and don't get stuck in the mud or fall into the pit.

As a minister I have a sensitivity to people in pain. People in pain have a way of getting to me. They bring out a part of me that cares deeply. I am often quiet with people in pain. I listen and take in all that is being said. I recently heard the cries of a person in deep emotional pain. The person's pain was most heavy. Friends, sometimes the best thing you can do for a person in pain is just let them pour it out. The darkness they feel comes into the light as you listen. When they bear their soul to you, please do not think you have to say anything. Listening is a great act of ministry. Counselors that are worth their pay, spend most of their time listening.

This is my point. There are things about God, there are truths about God, there are things revealed in the Bible about God that would greatly ease the person's pain if not take it all away.

Part of my brain is stuck on the book of Isaiah. This is true because of the magnificent view of God that Isaiah was privileged to see. Read chapter 6 of Isaiah. He got to see what we will only see when the Lord Jesus takes us home. He saw the Lord, high and lifted up. Upon seeing God, he learned things about God that takes us a lifetime to learn, and we may never

learn until we see God. Friends, please put your minds on what Isaiah saw, on who Isaiah saw. One sight of God and your whole life is changed forever. It is there that God's truth is most fully revealed. Read the book of Isaiah for Isaiah tells us what God showed him, what God revealed to him. Talk about special revelation. Isaiah felt his utter sinfulness until he felt completely forgiven. What Isaiah felt and saw in that moment is worth the read. The Bible says, "seek the Lord while he may be found." Call upon him as he is near." ²*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

Throughout the book of Isaiah, God told Isaiah what to write, what to say, and what to preach. Isaiah wrote more about Jesus than any other prophet. He could do that because He saw the Lord. Isaiah saw the greatest sight ever, one we have yet to see. In his writings he addresses the terrible sins of God's people. He tells them they are like trees about to be cut down. He tells them of impending judgment. When he sees the darkness of his day, he does not grow discouraged as you or I might. When speaking of God's terrible judgments, he also tells the people the good things about God that they will experience if they repent of their sinful ways. "The trees will be cut down but out of one stump will grow a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11). Isaiah was able to tell the people how rotten their sins were and why God's judgement was on the way, but he never left them without hope. No matter how bad the judgment, a great time of blessing will follow. "They shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountain and the hills shall break forth before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands, and all the trees will clap their hands, the trees of the field will clap their hands as we go out with joy (Isaiah 55:12). These verses speak about joy unspeakable. They tell us of such great joy that it seems as if the whole creation is singing praises to God. Everywhere we look we will see blessing upon blessing poured out from God in heaven. Judgment does not have the final word. God will use it to lead us to repent so a time of great blessing will return.

But unless you learn more and more about God, you do not have a clue about God and God's ways. **Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)** “⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Your knowledge of God determines your quality of life. **3. Your knowledge of God determines the enjoyment and intensity of your worship of God.** Therefore, the more you know God the greater your experience will be in worshipping God. You will be high and lifted up. Your singing grows to be a direct reflection of how great God is. Your worship is more alive. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. God's Holy Presence is always worth praising. You never want to miss a Sunday or Saturday night. To worship God is to participate in what you were made for. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

The greatest thing in all of life is praising God. The greatest thing in all of life is loving God. The greatest thing in all of life is God! Period. Isaiah saw God and there is so much for us to learn and know about God as we read Isaiah. Set your mind on God who reigns above. It is where there is only truth and no lies. It is where there is only goodness and no evil. It is where there is only light and no darkness. Paul Himself got caught up in the third heaven and so he too knows what he is talking about. In the Throne Room of God Paul heard things and was told things too great for us and he had to keep quiet about some of it but was free to tell us what God allowed him to say.

4. The more you know of God and God's Presence in your life, whatever happens to you cannot cause you to crumble. You cannot be shaken. **Isaiah 28:16 (NLT2)**

¹⁶*Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.* Isaiah could say this because He saw the Lord and learned the best way to build your life is on the sure foundation, Jesus. When you build your house on

the rock, the things of this earth cannot destroy you or blow you down or shake you to pieces for God is greater than it all. **Isaiah 26:4 (NLT2)** *4Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.*

5. It is only in having an increasing knowledge of God and his holy Presence that helps life to make sense in the midst of our pain and sorrows. The pain is still there but we know in God all will be made well. God will take all the pain and bring good out of it. But you only know this as a fact as you set your mind on God and read His word, where God is most clearly seen today. Isaiah and Paul got to see what we can only read about but God has told us that the Scriptures are sufficient for all our lives. We have His word. Weeping may come in the night, but joy comes in the morning.

For those who are in deep grief Isaiah writes, “But those who die in the Lord will live; their bodies will rise again!” “Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy.” Jesus gives us the fullness of this teaching when He tells us all who believe in Christ will never die. That means when they breathe their last, they are most alive than ever. I have found it is what we know about God and what we know about heaven that helps ease the pain of losing a loved one or loved ones.

For those of you who have lost young ones this is what Isaiah discovered from his experience with God’s holy Presence. **Isaiah 57:1 (NLT2)** *1Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time. But no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come.* This side of heaven you will never receive a finer answer than these words found in Isaiah. It was the kindness of God operating in their lives to spare them the evil to come and now they are in the perfect peace and goodness of God. How great is our God.

Our grief at death can be paralyzing. When I hear of people’s pain in grief, I grieve with them. The Bible says weep with those who weep. There is a time to weep and a time to mourn.

I also know that when we set our minds on God, when we ponder the realities of heavenly truth, it soothes our grief. The Bible lets me know how great they have it. Their sadness is all gone. There are no tears or pain in heaven. Yes, we still miss them. But the weight of the pain of losing them is balanced by knowing God has them right where He wants them. And in all this, God is so very good.

Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV) *¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* Until you spend the time focusing on things above, God's eternal truth and the Presence of God, you will live at the mercy of your own emotions. Everything about God is life building and will build you up. **Isaiah 26:3-4 (NLT2)** *³You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! ⁴Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.* I want us all to live the rest of our lives with our hearts, souls, and minds fixed on God. Putting our thoughts on God, on things above, where God reigns supreme is exactly what our soul needs to flourish here and soar as never before. Amen and Amen.

Let us pray.