

I want to start with a rhetorical question. I'm going to ask you a question. Don't shout out your answer, but actually answer the question.

So think in your head, have an answer to the question. What is the main thing God gets out of your life? What is the main thing that God gets out of our lives?

Are you thinking about money? Maybe gifts? Maybe glory even?

Maybe happiness? Well, Dallas Willard said, and it wouldn't be a Shanks sermon without a Dallas Willard quote, what God gets out of our lives, and indeed what we get out of our lives is simply the person we become.

What God gets out of our lives is simply the person we become. It's not the money that we can give him. You know God made money.

He doesn't need our money. It's not even the gifts that we have that we give back to God. Paul says in Romans 11, no one has ever given to God that God should repay them.

And it's not even the glory that we can give God that he is primarily after. It's not as though all the glory that one earthly life could give to God is what God is after. What God wants from you is you, the person you become.

What God gets out of our lives is simply the person you become. So the question today is, what person are you becoming? What person are you becoming?

It is my deep belief that our passage today gives us one of the best answers to that question in the entire Bible. You couldn't pick a better question to talk about the person we are becoming.

In Colossians 3, 1-17, which Janet read out for us, we have a vision of personhood in the way of Jesus, which I think is compelling and transformative. What person are you becoming?

As you know, as you can see, we're in a series in the Book of Colossians in January. Of course, as we always say, if you missed any of the messages, they're all on our website and the podcast.

Colossians, if you didn't know, is a letter written from the Apostle Paul, who's one of the leaders of the early church, to the church living in Colossae in Central Turkey. Nowadays, it's just a big hill.

I've been privileged to stand on top of the hill and there's some little pebbles on the ground and you think, wow, what an incredible city is beneath the hill, but it's not a church there anymore.

In the first sermon in this series, it was called Everlasting Hope, we looked at the fact that our Christian hope is secure, not because heaven is such a fortress, but because of the character of our God.

Last Sunday morning, if you were here, we looked at everlasting supremacy. Jesus is our supreme leader. His doing, his being, his leading and his redeeming.

And today, our title is Everlasting Personhood. Did you know that personhood is everlasting? Personhood is everlasting.

Now you might think, well, what do you mean by that? But let me convince you. There are pretty much two options for what is the most fundamental reality in the universe.

Either eternal matter or eternal personhood. Eternal matter is this stuff, like atoms, matter. Or there's eternal personhood.

And in the worldview of the Bible, in Christian theology, eternal personhood is at the heart of the entire universe. We believe that when it says in the first page of the Bible, in the beginning, God.

That God is revealed to us as Father, Son and Spirit. As three persons in one being of ultimate love. And out of the reality of God, the person of God, He created us.

And so personhood, if we know Christ, is everlasting. And today we're going to look at what type of person we are becoming. Before we land in Colossians 3, it's probably worth answering the question, what is a person?

Now the simple answer is, you are a person. And you're a person. And you're a person.

And you're a person. I'm a person. Every one of us are persons, made in the image of God.

But I love this quote from Andy Crouch. He's one of my favourite authors. He says, every human person is a heart, soul, mind, strength, complex designed for love.

He got that from Deuteronomy 6.4. That's the Shema, the holiest prayer of Judaism. Hero, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength. So every human person has a heart and a soul and, well, is a soul and has a mind and strength and these different faculties united into one person.

That's what it is to be a person, is a complex designed for love. That is what you are and what I am. Another way of answering the question, what is a person, is this diagram.

If you've been around NorthernLife for like three weeks, you would have seen this diagram, or if you've read our book, Wayform on Spiritual Formation, this is from Dallas Willard in his book, Renovation of the Heart.

It describes the different aspects of the person, but rather than just listing them, it kind of gives them a sense of ordering in the way that they function in our lives. So in the middle, we have the will, the heart, the spirit, that's a synonym.

Coming out of that, we have the mind, the things we think about, which influence our emotions, influence our body, and finally, we live in a context, a relational network of people, and all of that is called the soul.

As the saying goes, it's not that we have a soul, but that we are a soul. So this is the vision of personhood that we're going to be working with today as we go through Colossians 3, 1-17.

Paul says in Colossians 3, verse 1, Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Everlasting personhood in the way of Jesus begins with setting the heart, or the will, the spirit. If you look at verse 1, if we can go back a slide, verse 1, there are two you statements. Firstly, you have been raised and set your hearts.

And these are two different kinds of statements. If you look at the grammar, one of them is what they call an indicative statement. It's a statement of truth.

And one of them is an imperative, a command. A statement, an indicative, and an imperative. And I think for us, it is crucial, as we think about human personhood, to get the order right between these two things.

Because if we start with the imperative, that is, start with the command, you have religion. Every world religion is built on the imperative first. You must do this, and this, and this, and this.

And then you will get the indicative. You will get eternal life or transformation. You will become the person that you want to be if you do these things.

But the good news of Jesus, of Christianity, that this church is built on, is that they are swapped the other way. We don't start with the imperative of what we must do. The gospel begins with what Jesus has already done for us.

And so we see this kind of tension in the writings of Paul. Paul wrote, I think, it's 13 letters in the New Testament. And in every single letter, you see this indicative, imperative thing, as the scholars call it.

Paul will spend, normally, about half the letter, so 8 to 12 chapters of Romans, just telling the story of the Gospel, just stating who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

And then at about the halfway point, he'll pivot and start to apply it to our lives in the form of commands and imperatives. And we even see it in our passage today, in a couple of verses before our passage, Colossians chapter 2.

Paul says, When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.

He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. When you look at that, there's not a single command, right?

Not a single word in that whole passage tells us what we should do, because it's indicative. It states what Jesus has already done.

And then we get to Colossians 3, and it says, Since then you have been raised with Christ, therefore, set your hearts on things above. So Paul gives the command coming out of the gospel.

Because of what Jesus has done, we are to set our hearts on things above. The foundation of personhood in the way of Jesus is to set the heart on things above.

The result of the gospel is a heart that is spiritually alive and able to be set on things above. And so as we think about what it is to be a person formed in the image of Jesus, it starts with the heart. Setting the heart on things above.

Proverbs 4 verse 23 says, Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. That's true. If the heart is the center of our soul, everything we do flows from what we have set our heart on, and everything flows from that.

The second kind of truth moving forward is that we become like the thing that we set our heart on. We've said this a few times, but in the Old Testament, the word is idolatry.

Idolatry is giving your heart's affection to something that is other than God. And all throughout the Bible, especially in the Book of Psalms, there's this repeated idea that those who worship idols become like them.

We become like the thing that we worship. CS. Lewis, the author of the Narnia books, wrote this in his book, Mere Christianity.

Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, and we can say that's the heart, the will. You are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses into something a little different from what it was before.

And taking your life as a whole with all your innumerable choices, all your life long, you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature.

Either into a creature that is in harmony with God and with other creatures and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God and with its fellow creatures and with itself.

Each of us, at each moment, is progressing to the one state or the other. We become like what we set our hearts on. And when you follow that trajectory to the end, there's only two places that it can go.

Living today in 2025, there's a hundred million things you could set your heart on. But if you follow it to its end, it is turning us into, in Lewis's words, a hellish creature or a heavenly creature. The things that we set our heart on form us.

From the inside out. So what does it mean for us to set our heart on the things above? It's an act of the will.

It's intentional. It's a decision. If you're a Christian today, then you at some point in your life declared Jesus is Lord.

Remember the 24 baptisms we had last year. Every one of those people said, I declare Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. And then they got dunked.

To be a Christian is to declare Jesus is Lord. But what I've noticed is, while my life broadly declares that Jesus is Lord, I don't wake up feeling very much in line with that truth.

And so I wake up, and it is a decision to again declare that Jesus is Lord. To set my heart on things above is what it means for us to be formed from the heart. Set your hearts on things above.

Paul continues in verse 2. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Everlasting personhood in the way of Jesus involves the renewal of the mind. So we're working from the inside out.

We've started in the center of this diagram with the will, the heart, the spirit, and now we move out to the mind, the renewal of the mind. Willard, Dallas Willard said that the mind processes three things, information, images, and ideas.

All of us have a cognitive, rational brain that is able to process information, images, and ideas.

And in the way of Jesus, what it means for our mind to be renewed is to replace the information, images, and ideas of the world with the information, images, and ideas of heaven.

To be renewed in our mind, that's what Paul says in Romans 12 verse 2, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, perfect, and pleasing will. If our mind is transformed, it transforms the rest of our life. It will work from the inside out.

So I want to give you three tips, three ways that we renew our mind. Meditation, repetition, memorization. Meditation, repetition, memorization.

Firstly, meditation. The mind is renewed through meditation.

The psalmist says in Psalm 1, Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do, prospers.

Meditating on his law, the same thing in Joshua 1 verse 8, Keep this book of the law, this always on your lips, meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Meditation is at the heart of the renewal of the mind. But just to clarify, we're not talking about a kind of Eastern spirituality meditation, because that kind of meditation is primarily about emptying your mind.

You're trying to get rid of all thoughts. The type of meditation that the scripture talks about is the opposite. It's filling your mind with truth.

In fact, the Hebrew word translated meditate in Psalm 1 and Joshua 1, it means to mutter, to like say words under your breath. It's renewing your mind on truth, as you meditate on scripture. So firstly, the mind is renewed through meditation.

Secondly, repetition, the mind is renewed through repetition. Question, this is a, say the answer. The mind is renewed through repetition.



What is the next sentence I'm about to say?

Repetition rewires the brain.

Repetition rewires the brain or the Brian. If you don't know, if people are laughing, because that's a two and a half years ago, when I was 22, I preached the best sermon of my life. I peaked early.

I had this story. I'm not going to tell the story now, because you can go back and listen to the sermon. It's called the rewire principle, and then you'll understand and you can laugh next time.

Repetition rewires the brain. Repetition rewires the brain. Meditation on scripture is not enough if you do that once, and then never again.

But the vision that we're supposed to have from scripture to renew our mind is repetition on the truth of scripture, and that will rewire our brains. Firstly, meditation. Secondly, repetition.

And thirdly, memorization. The mind is renewed through memorization. In my experience, that's an unpopular thing to say.

When I talk to people about memorization, very frequently they'll come back and say, Oh, I have such a bad memory. I can't memorize things. My job is such that my mind doesn't have space.

And like, fair, I don't know what your brain is like or your job is like. But it's a bit of a cop-out to say that I can't memorize things. I'm not even going to try.

It's like when you meet someone and you say, Hi, my name is Ben. And they go, Oh, hi, Ben. I'm really bad at remembering names.

You're like, can you try? Like, if you say that, you're not even going to try to remember my name. I actually think that God has given us minds that can memorize things.

I have memorized different parts of scripture in my life. I've memorized Psalm 1, 1-3, and I delivered most of it from memory then. I had to check a couple of things.

I've also memorized Colossians 3, 1-17, our passage that we read out today. And that is because the house that I spent the most time in as a child, apart from home, was our best family friend's house.

We were there, like, a couple of times a week for piano lessons and just hanging out. And on the back of their bathroom door, they had printed Colossians 3, 1-17.

So for years and years of my life, like a dozen years, when I was on the toilet, I was staring at Colossians 3, 1-17, and meditation, repetition and memorization ingrained those words in my soul.

So now, I could deliver Colossians 3, 1-17, but it takes 95 seconds to do the whole thing. So I won't do it for us. My point is, memorization is possible.

If you say, I'm not a person who can memorize things, I don't even try, I think you're missing out on something. And I invite you to try.

Try to memorize scripture, even one verse, and then expand it, multiple verses, and you'll be amazed at what happens. The mind is renewed by meditation, repetition, and memorization.

Paul says, set your hearts on things above, set your minds on things above, and then in verse 5, put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived, but now you must also rid yourself of all such things as these. Anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off the old self and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Here, there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, skithian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all. Everlasting personhood in the way of Jesus involves, thirdly, taking off the old. And putting on the new.

We're working from the inside out of this diagram. We've started with the heart, the will, the spirit, then the mind, which renews the emotions, and now we come to the body. What is our body forming us into?

Scott McKnight, in his book, *Fasting, The Ancient Practices*, he lists four views that our culture tends to have of the way that we look at our body. The first one is a monster to be conquered.

If you're familiar with that kind of conception, people think that the body is only desire, and it is like a monster that can't be controlled, but we have to subdue it, because the body is a monster.

Secondly, as a celebrity to be glorified, people use their bodies as a canvas to express who they are. They do all sorts of things to make themselves look great, because the body is to be glorified.

Thirdly, we think of the body as a cornucopia to be filled. That's not so much about what we look like, but about the pleasure that we feel.

The body is just kind of a machine that accepts dopamine and endorphins, and we are to plug it full of pleasure. Fourthly, we think of the body as a wallflower to be ignored.

That's kind of a platonic, Plato idea that the body is bad and the spirit is good. So let's get rid of the body. Each of our views of the way that the body functions in life will form us into a certain kind of person.

It's obvious. If you think that your body is a celebrity to be glorified, that will shape what you do with your body. But Paul has, I think, a different view of the follower of Jesus' relationship to the body, and that is old to be renewed.

He says in verse 5, Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. That's the old nature. In verse 7, You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived.

Verse 9, Do not lie to each other since you have taken off. It's the image of clothing. Taken off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

So the key to what I think is a more helpful way of thinking about the body is old and new. Taking off the old and putting on the new. That's the key to what Paul is saying about the body.

And I think that's really helpful. It's profoundly helpful to view the body as old, which is being renewed. And interestingly, it seems like modern habit psychology is only just catching up to this 2,000-year-old truth.

I read the book Atomic Habits by James Clear, and he sort of synthesizes lots of the psychology research on how people change. And I'll come to him in a second. Colossians 3, 1-17 lists a lot of sins that happen in the body.

Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry, anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. These are sins which live in the body, which we're trying to be formed out of.

So let's take anger as an example. James Clear, who's an author who has synthesized psychology research, says that there's two ways to change a habit. There's outcome change and identity change.

Outcome change and identity change. So if we take anger, in the moment when someone cuts across me in traffic or beeps the horn or I'm tempted to anger, if I am after outcome change, what I'm telling myself is, I'm trying not to be angry.

I don't want to be angry. You're focused on the outcome. I don't want to be angry.

Let me try not to be angry. But James Clear says that the opposite is identity change. And that is when the temptation to anger comes, we say, I'm not an angry person.

My old self used to be pretty angry, but I have taken off the old self and have put on the new self. And the new self that Jesus is making me is not a person who gets angry.

And the research shows that that's a far, far better way of changing, is to realise that we are old and being made new. Identity resistance is the best way to fight these sins.

To say, no, that feeling of lust or anger or whatever you're feeling, that's part of my old self. And Paul says that I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

So we put off the old and put on the new, because Everlasting Personhood in the way of Jesus involves the transformation of the body. Firstly, set the heart. Secondly, renew the mind.

Thirdly, take off the old and put on the new. And finally, do life together. And this is what we'll close with.

Paul says in verse 12, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Since as members of one body, you were called to peace and be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Everlasting personhood in the way of Jesus involves doing life together.

And now we kind of come towards the outside of the circle of personhood that we've been working through. It starts in the heart, set your heart, renew your minds, take off the old, put on the new.

And then finally we get to the relational network that we find ourselves in. I think you know probably more than I do that the community that we do life with, the people who we run with, have a significant formative effect on us.

Have you heard the statement, I don't know if it's true, but it's been repeated enough that it sounds true, you are the average of your five closest friends.

I don't know if that's true, but I think it is true that we become like the people who we spend time with. We are formed by the community that we do life with.

And so as, I mean, I'm looking at the church, NorthernLife, this community of faith, we have an incredible opportunity to do life together and help each other in the way of becoming like Jesus.

Because we can see in each other what the other can't see in themselves. We can encourage and comfort and at times rebuke with truth and love. And we can together become all that Jesus wants us to be as a community of faith.

I find it interesting when you step back and you look at the whole passage that we've worked through today, Colossians 3, 1-17. And you take all of the commands. These are the commands.

Seek, set your mind, put to death, put off, do not lie, put on, let, rule and become. These are the imperatives which shape our passage. Every single one of them is plural.

Meaning Paul is not writing to one person, he's writing to a community. Because this life following Jesus is a life that we do together. We put off the old together and we put on the new together.

We do not lie to each other together. We do all these things together because that's the life that we've been designed for. And so Paul says that we are to be a community marked by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Marked by forgiveness and love, peace and gratitude. So that's a great opportunity for us as a community of faith to help each other in the way of becoming like Jesus. I opened with this quote and I'll close with it too.

Dallas Willard says, What God gets out of our lives, and indeed what we get out of our lives, is simply the person we become. So who are you becoming? What is forming you?

What direction are you heading? As Lewis said, ultimately, we're only heading one of two directions. What person are you becoming?

I encourage you to, I mean, you could try and memorize part of Colossians 3, but saturate yourself with the vision of personhood that Jesus offers us.

And it's a vision which is characterized by setting the heart, renewing the mind, taking off the old, putting on the new, and doing life together. So I'd like to invite the bands to come up.

I'm going to pray in a second, but you guys can come up and get ready. We're about to sing some songs together.

And as I was wrapping up this sermon, I had this kind of realization that what we're about to do for the next 10 minutes is a very formative experience. Because in worship, we set our hearts' affection on God.

In worship, with the lyrics that we say, we fix our minds' attention on truth. We set our minds on truth. As Paul says in Romans 12, 1, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

This is your true and proper worship. Worship involves the giving of the body and at the end, we do it together in community. So would you like to stand?

As we worship together, we are being formed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as we do that, I'd love to pray for us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gospel.

We have to start there. We don't start with what we must do, but with gratitude, we receive what you have already done for us. You took our place on the cross.

You took upon yourself all of our brokenness and our sin. And you loved us so much even to the end. And we thank you and we remember that, Lord Jesus, you are alive even now.

You have defeated the world, the flesh, and the devil. And now we have new life. And we can spend eternity with you.

So I pray for this community of faith, Lord, the people we are becoming. We want to be like you. And so we pray you'd help us in our week.

Holy Spirit, would you show us what it is to set our heart on things above, to set our mind on things above. When temptation comes, Lord, help us to put off the old, to be able to say that that's not who we are anymore. Help us to put on the new.



And we want to do life together, Lord, that you might receive all the glory in the persons that we become. In Jesus' name, Amen.