

I love invitations. I love them because they make me feel wanted. I love them because they present me with an opportunity to do something for someone or be a part of something with someone. Invitations are inviting! Genius I know 😊. I say that because they are not off putting in any way to me.

What I read first when I read Paul’s letter here to the Colossians is an invitation. And it is an invitation to something extremely important. I like to be a part of things that are important. Paul’s invitation is for me to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is... to set my mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” What an invitation? What an honor? This is not only an invitation to do something important for someone else, it has my special attention because it is an invitation to do something important for me. And in turn, if I am willing, the door will be open for me to be a part of something extremely important with someone of the utmost importance, our Lord Jesus.

Do you want to hear something amazing? Now, don’t tell anyone 😊 but you are being invited with this invitation too! “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is... set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

I am invited. You are invited. We are all invited to receive this very special opportunity and gift. This invitation is for all who seek to be raised with Christ, all who seek to be in relationship with God- in faith and practice, all who long to be revealed with Christ in glory (aka, all who desire to be with God in heaven throughout eternity). What an invitation? What an honor? What a gift?

Have you ever heard the quote “You can’t get to where you are going if you don’t have a destination”? It highlights the importance of having a north star, a reliable and dependable GPS setting that keeps you focused on what matters most. Without directions, I will have the tendency to wander and who knows where that will lead me. However, with my sights set on the things that are above, where Christ is, I am sure to find and experience Christ along the way.

You what I don't always love though. I don't always care for invitations that come with caveats or conditions or requirements. And I don't mean bringing a gift or something to contribute. This invitation to seek that which is above, as Paul carries on in verses 5 through 11, comes with a list of things that I must be willing to do. And not just once, but over and over and over again. And you all, what Paul is inviting me to do, us to do, is put to death some things. I don't know about you, but I prefer life to death. I prefer (*I don't always do it but I prefer to*) to think about things that are living and free and thriving, not things that are wilting or captive or struggling to survive. I don't like to think about death.

But here is what I have come to learn. The ironic thing about life, is that I must be willing to acknowledge death for life to have the power and strength and honor and glory it is. The hard reality is that true life is born out of the death of that in our life which is not true. I think light is similar. We know the power and strength of light in the presence of darkness. True light is witnessed out of the illumination of darkness that attempts to extinguish the light in our life. Death is a necessary means to an end and that is ok.

Any good gardener or green thumb knows that pruning is a necessary step in the sustainability of a plant's life. Pruning away the dead parts makes room for new growth and new life and new blossoms to flourish. Pruning, putting to death, parts of our life that prevent life and light, that keep us from seeking and focusing on that which is above, where Christ is, is a necessary step for us all. Sometimes the soil in which the plant is planted becomes "soiled" and unhealthy, requiring the plant to be plucked up and replanted in soil that is good. It doesn't matter whether I like it, it has to happen for me to live free and thriving.

Paul provides his list to consider, "fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language." I might add to this list control, pride, comfort, lying, disregarding others, selfishness, rush to judgement, criticism, cynicism, prejudice.

These things must die in my life because they are not of Christ. Christ doesn't even like to share a room with them. He has drawn a line in the sand and said, "Get away from me, Satan!" To be with Christ, to seek things that are above, I must be willing to put to death things are of earth, things that ultimately don't matter, things that take life instead of give it, things that destroy rather than build up.

The blessing and beauty of doing the hard part, being forged in the fire, is the new life that blooms. I am willing to put to death those things that keep me from Christ because of the new life in Christ promised to me when I do. This takes faith and trust. Faith that God will provide and care and protect. Faith that God's promises are everything God says they are. Faith that Jesus is all that I read about and admire and respect as a human and leader. Faith that the power of the Holy Spirit is the true and best advocate for my life, with nothing but my best interests in mind. Trust that I don't need these other things the world tells me or has tricked me to believe I need. I want them. They make me feel good at times. They are attractive and sometimes the more natural or comfortable way. However, they don't carry the same meaning or purpose or promise that Christ does. Trust that the best thing for me lies in the image of Christ, Imago Dei- image of God. Trust that by seeking that which is above will fulfill me and care for me all the days of my life and even beyond.

A new life in Christ is worth the sacrifice and death of these other things because a new life in Christ includes the best of the best for not only me, but all those I am around and have been given the opportunity to live life with. New life in Christ, as Paul puts it, includes the expression and embodiment of "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." A new life in Christ means I am willing to bear with others and forgive others. Not because I can, but because Christ has forgiven me, and that forgiveness and grace pours out of me. A new life in Christ means love and a peace that dwells and rules my heart. A new life in Christ is thankful and appreciative. A new life in Christ is empowerment to teach and mentor with Godly wisdom and understanding.

I have been given the invitation at a variety of points and seasons in my life to ask this question, "What kind of life do I desire to live?" And no matter how many times I look in the mirror or dig deep into my heart, the answer I have come to has been a desire to live new and whole and full and joyful in Christ. It hasn't been a perfect ride up to this point. There have been valleys and mountaintops and plateaus. I have struggled to put to death several things along the way, sometimes on more than one occasion, but in each occurrence of death, new life has grown, and I don't regret for a second the choice and effort to seek that which is above, where Christ is, over the dysfunction and struggle of continuing down pathways of life with no north star or comprehensible GPS setting.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."

Jesus said, "Come, follow me."