



GREATER THAN • COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY • COLOSSIANS 3

Greater Than Our Old Life

A guided conversation from the August 16, 2026 sermon by Jeff Sullivan

SUMMARY

Jeff Sullivan is fifty and teaching himself to run again. Twenty minutes of warm-up for a twenty-minute run, stiff hips from years of sitting, the whole thing feeling like punishment — even though a two-year-old in a nursery runs for the sheer pleasure of it. Something he was built for now has to be relearned from scratch.

That is the honest shape of Colossians 3:5. Paul lists what has to go — sexual immorality, greed, anger, rage, slander, the words we wish we could take back — and here is the thing worth noticing: almost nobody argues with the list. We do not want those things. We hate them. And we cannot kill them.

So the only reasonable response to "put to death" is a question: how? Sullivan's answer runs backward, to verses 1 through 4. Set your heart. Set your mind. He says it twice because we are experts at splitting them. The difference between the piano his mother made him practice for an hour a day — which he abandoned the day he graduated — and the guitar his son taught himself in a dorm room is not discipline. It is desire.

But that only pushes the problem back a step, because your desires are the broken thing. Quoting Louie Giglio, Sullivan names the reframe the whole sermon turns on: sin doesn't make you bad, it makes you dead. We file sin as a flaw to correct or a disease to heal, and every one of those framings assumes the patient is alive and needs improving. Colossians 3:3 says you died. Dead people do not need coaching. They need someone who can conquer death.

Only then does the clothing make sense. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and over all of it love — every item an interior quality that radiates outward, not a task to complete. Which is why the disciplines are not the goal. They are how a heart is trained to become the goal.

PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

Father, we have tried to fix ourselves and we are tired. We agree with your list and we cannot keep it. Meet us in the gap between what we want and what we can do, and show us what you have already done. Amen.

START ICE BREAKER

Sullivan says running should be the most natural thing in the world, and for most adults it is torture. What is something you were built to do — physically, relationally, spiritually — that now feels impossibly hard?

SCRIPTURE KEY SCRIPTURES

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2 (NIV)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above... Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

COLOSSIANS 3:3 (NIV)

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

COLOSSIANS 3:5 (NIV)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

COLOSSIANS 3:12 (NIV)

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

COLOSSIANS 3:14-15 (NIV)

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

COLOSSIANS 3:17 (NIV)

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

DISCUSS DISCUSSION

01 THE LIST YOU ALREADY AGREE WITH

Read Colossians 3:5-9 aloud. Sullivan's observation is that nobody reads this list and wants to keep the items on it. If we genuinely agree with the list, why is agreeing so obviously not enough? What does that tell you about where the real problem sits?

02 PIANO OR GUITAR

One boy practiced an hour a day under his mother's rule and quit the day he graduated. The other taught himself with YouTube tutorials and still plays. Where in your own faith are you practicing the piano — doing the right thing with no desire underneath it? Be specific.

03 BAD, OR DEAD?

"Sin doesn't make you bad. It makes you dead." Most of us treat sin as a flaw to correct or a habit to manage. What actually changes if you take Colossians 3:3 literally — that you died? Is that discouraging or freeing, and why?

04 HIDDEN, NOT FINISHED

Paul says your life is hidden with Christ. Sullivan describes a buried treasure being uncovered a little at a time. How does that image change the way you read a week where the old self showed up again?

05 WHOSE STORY COUNTS

Sullivan lays Saul, the disciples, and the person who grew up in church side by side and refuses to rank them. Which of the three is closest to your story? Have you ever felt your testimony was too undramatic to be real?

06 THE GOAL, AND THE TRAINING

Look hard at 3:12-15. Every item is interior — compassion, humility, patience, love, peace. If those are the goal, what are Bible reading, serving and giving actually for? What changes about how you do them?

APPLY

LIFE APPLICATION

Paul's order is not the order we usually attempt. We start with behavior, fail, and try harder. He starts underneath it. Three moves for this week, in his order rather than ours.

- 1 **Change the prayer** Stop praying "help me stop doing this" and start praying "change what I want." One is a request for willpower; the other is a request for a new heart. Pray the second one every day this week and notice how differently it sits.
- 2 **Name one piano** Identify one practice you are keeping out of obligation with no desire behind it. Do not quit it — ask honestly what would have to change in you for it to become a guitar. Bring your answer back to the group.
- 3 **Train, don't perform** Pick one discipline — Scripture, prayer, serving, showing up Sunday — and do it this week explicitly as training toward becoming more patient, or kinder, or quicker to forgive. Name the target before you start. Notice whether that changes the experience.

Sullivan's warning is worth repeating: the disciplines themselves are not the goal, and treating them as the goal is how people end up exhausted and religious. But that is not permission to skip them. They are the instruments Christ uses to kill what is dead in you — which is exactly why gathering, singing, sitting under the Word, and forgiving the person two rows over are not optional extras. They are where the work gets done.

REMEMBER

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ You already agree with the list. Agreement has never once been enough.
- ▶ Paul says it twice — set your heart, set your mind — because desire and thought are one engine, not two departments.
- ▶ Discipline without desire produces a skill you abandon at the first opportunity.
- ▶ Sin doesn't make you bad. It makes you dead. You were never going to out-discipline a grave.
- ▶ Hidden is not the same as gone. The old self raising its head is not proof that nothing happened.
- ▶ The disciplines are not the goal. They are how a heart is trained to become the goal.

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.

PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you did not come to improve us. You came to raise the dead. We stop defending our own effort and receive what you have already accomplished. May everything we do in word and deed be done for your glory. Amen.

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