

# Healthy Habits

## Is your soul in shape?

1-15-17

### Matthew 16:24-28

Passage: <sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. <sup>26</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?<sup>[a]</sup> Is anything worth more than your soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. <sup>28</sup> And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

We are in our second week of our sermon series Healthy Habits. We are taking a look during this series at various areas of our life that can benefit this year by cultivating healthy habits. I'd like to begin this morning with a story to help us see the importance of having a healthy spiritual life.

What kind of life do you want? Better yet, who do you want to be? How do you want to be remembered? These were the questions that I was wrestling with. That last question feels kind of morbid doesn't it? How do you want to be remembered? It seems to convey that you have passed on and are no longer around. Yet there it is and it was the question I wrestled with after having been to my second funeral in just two months. This funeral, however, was the one that wrecked me. It was the one that caused me to consider these questions and lead to answers that have served to remind me time and time again what it is that I'm to pursue.

It was a few years ago now, but I still remember it well. It was the funeral of one of my most influential professors. You know those people who are absolutely brilliant and humble at the same time? They're a rare kind of person and when you're in their company even if you're not especially close with them, they seem to have an impact simply by the way they live their life. This was Dr. Dorsey. I remember at the funeral one of the eulogizers said that it was difficult to describe Dr. Dorsey without making him sound like part of the trinity. Everyone in the room agreed. He was both humble and brilliant. Funny and compassionate. Challenging and loving. He was indeed a remarkable person. As I sat there, I took in the scene. I arrived about a half hour before the funeral so that I could be pay my respects to the family. The viewing had begun about an hour before the funeral and the line went out the chapel and down the

length of the hallway for that entire hour as hundreds of people showed up to pay their respects. When the funeral began, the chapel was completely packed with over 500 mourners. There wasn't a dry eye in the place. This was the epitome of a life well-lived. It was this that caused me to think, how will I be remembered and how do I want to be remembered?

### **How will you be remembered?**

You see too often we measure our lives and the lives of others by how large their house is or how successful someone is at their work. We may secretly envy those who are able to afford the nicest house in the nicest area and drive the latest luxury car. We even have the expression, "they have it all." Admittedly I'm guilty of this at times. Yet, when I was at Dr. Dorsey's funeral, I realized more powerfully in that moment that none of that mattered. None of it held a candle to the humble life of someone who pursued God with all their heart, who aligned their work with the work of God. We all know these kinds of people don't we? The kind of person who has this grace about them and acts compassionately when most would seek revenge. Their very lives are attractive, but not because of the things they have. They're attractive because of who they are and the way they handle their relationships. So how do we become that kind of person? How do we become people whose lives are worth emulating? Our passage this morning will both challenge us and give us hope to live this kind of life.

Passage: Matthew 16:24-28

Jesus lays out the gauntlet here. He isn't pulling punches and he's kind of telling it like it is. He is saying that if you pursue all of these material things and all this worldly gain then you've missed the point entirely and you've missed out on life. Yet his statements about life are bookended by invitations. Invitations that are at once challenging and beautiful. So let's go ahead and dive into the passage and see what we need to hear this morning.

I normally like to start at the beginning of the passage, but I think today it is appropriate for us to take a look at the middle of the passage so that we can better understand the invitation that he is offering at the beginning. He says in the middle of this passage: *If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.* Later he says: *And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?* These two passages speak pretty well to our culture don't they? What does it look like to hang on to our life? What does it look like to gain the whole world? To put it simply and kind of bluntly it means looking out for number 1. Now, how are we doing in this area? How are we doing in the department of pursuing God's will above our own? I think it is easy for us to construct an image of someone who is failing right?

{clip from Lorax}

There is this great example from the movie *The Lorax* that gives us the very definition of this. The Once-ler was originally this happy-go-lucky guy who had a great time and seemed to be loved by the animals and had a great thing going. Soon, however, he began to look out for his own interests and lost sight of what was important leading to the cutting down of all the trees. It was only at the end of it all that he realized that he had indeed lost everything that mattered. This is a common story for us. There are headlines rather consistently of people who have pursued their own way and sought after material things who have tragically ended their lives. We read about people who seem to have it all, but are miserable on the inside. They outwardly show smiles and flaunt their wealth all the while they are in the midst of terrible divorce proceedings. Our culture seems to suggest that we need the material things to be happy. We need the latest phone or the largest TV or the best house on the block. Yet these are pursuits of our own life that Christ says will cause us to lose our life. We're different though right? We don't fall into that trap of pursuing what the world wants do we?

It would be nice to simply look at those instances and compare ourselves by that yardstick, but the truth is we are still just as guilty. We may not have the wealth to do all of those things, but there are many ways that we still seek out our own comfort rather than seeking out Christ. I think we can agree that we don't have to look far in our own hearts to find some selfishness, right? Someone criticizes you about something or your spouse asks you to do a simple chore at the end of a long day, part of you wants to grumble and complain. And we honestly feel justified in that sometimes. I was reading a devotion over Advent and it said something to the effect that other people grumble and complain, I offer justified and legitimate observations. Don't we sometimes see it that way. You see, we may not have the obvious signs that are seen in our movie example or the headlines but the underlying theme is the same isn't it? We want things to be our way and aren't happy when that doesn't work out. We are still motivated by pride. In fact, the further we dig into our own souls, we begin to realize the depth of our pride and selfishness.

What happens when this selfishness and pride is allowed to fester? It's obvious isn't it? Our souls begin to get out of shape. The more we desire our own way in marriage, the more difficult that marriage becomes. [example] The more we desire our own way at work, the more strained our relationships with coworkers become. The more we desire our own way, the more our souls become out of shape. This leads to brokenness in the rest of our lives. If our soul isn't in shape, if we have allowed pride to fester, then the things that truly matter will begin to suffer. So if we're going to get our souls back into shape, we first need to let go of our pride and selfishness.

**Pride harms the soul.**

*25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? [a] Is anything worth more than your soul? Matthew 16:25-26*

Now letting go of pride is great and a worthy goal, but we're talking about developing habits that lead to changes right? We have spoken about letting go of pride before but how do we get there? For most, if not all, of us humility is not something that comes naturally and certainly doesn't come easily. So how does one cultivate this life of humility? What habits do we need to build into our lives that will help us to grow in this area? Well let's again examine our passage so that we can understand a bit more what God's call is for us.

Jesus says that we are to abandon our own way, to take up our cross, and follow him. We can see how abandoning our way lines up with what we've been talking about this morning. It is about letting go of our pride and selfishness, but it's not too clear exactly what that looks like at first glance does it? In fact it seems a bit daunting if you think about it. Abandoning our own way is difficult. I have learned that quickly in marriage. Marriage has a way of revealing your bad habits that you've grown blind to. But the point of this part of the passage is what we've already touched on which is that we need humility in our lives. The next two parts of his command will help us to find habits that lead to that kind of life.

### **Humility reclaims our soul.**

*But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. Matthew 16:25b*

So the next two commands he gives us is to take up our cross and follow him. Most of the time we look at that and think that we need to endure suffering since the cross is what Jesus endured. While that is true, it fails to capture the full meaning of it. Remember, Jesus went to the cross as an act of submission to God. He chose to do the Father's will no matter the cost. This is a picture of humility. It is actively choosing a way that is not your own. How did he get to that place? If we look at the scriptures it is clear that he got there through prayer. The night of his betrayal, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed. In it he asks God the Father to take this cup from him, but then says this powerful line in Matthew 26:39, "Yet I want your will not mine." This point of humility is in the midst of one of his intense prayers. Yet we see throughout his life, this dedication to prayer. We see throughout the gospels that Jesus would rise early and go to a quiet place and pray. Prayer was the cornerstone of Jesus' spiritual life. It kept the connection between the Father and Jesus. And it was through prayer that Jesus said yes to the cross in an incredible act of submission. If we are to follow Jesus we need to begin by following him in prayer.

### **Prayer leads to submission to God.**

*You must give up your own way, take up your cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24b*

So what does prayer look like in our lives? What would it look like for us to commit to prayer this new year? We have this idea that prayer needs to look a certain way. We think it has to be long and theologically deep. We have this idea that prayer needs to be about others only. Yet some of the best prayers are short and very simple. Some of my favorite prayers are called breath prayers or centering prayers which are simply one line said with a breath and yet they have a way of restoring that connection with God in the middle of whatever I'm going through. They have a way of reminding me of who I am before God and what he has done on my behalf. In those moments it has a way of diverting my attention away from my own needs and back to God's. Prayer is first and foremost a way of connecting with God. It is about building that relationship.

When we spend time in prayer, we begin to find our own pride slowly ebbs away. We begin to focus on others rather than ourselves. Have you ever prayed for your enemy before and found yourself beginning to care about them? What about when you have spent time in prayer for someone who has hurt you and you eventually find it in yourself to forgive that person. Furthermore, think about what happens when you begin to spend time in prayer for those hurting in your community. When you begin to see that as important enough to pray for regularly don't you begin to care more and more for those people? Don't you begin to look for ways to help? You see prayer has a way of changing our hearts and minds. It has a way of breaking down our pride and opening us up to God's purposes. Prayer is one of the best tools for restoring our soul.

**Prayer restores our soul.**

*But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. Matthew 16:25b*

Let me return to my opening story. Dr. Dorsey had hundreds of people at his funeral, but even the number of people didn't matter. You see the thing that mattered the most was the impact that he had on people. That impact came because Dr. Dorsey was known for his heart for God. He was known for having a foundation of prayer. That foundation spilled out into the rest of his life. It seeped into the way he dealt with his students and fellow professors. It was evident in the way he treated his critics. You see, I know a number of people who I would consider genuinely humble, but I know of nobody who I would consider humbler than Dr. Dorsey. That humility came from a life of prayer. You know these types of people. You've met them before. They exude that humble spirit and I would wager that for many of them it comes from a deep connection with God, a connection that has come from a life of prayer. So this year let's cultivate a habit of prayer. Let us set aside time to develop our prayer lives and seek God with every decision we make. Here at CrossPoint we are committed to this habit and so starting January 18<sup>th</sup> we will be having a 5 week class taught by Pastor Ryan on prayer. Maybe this is the first step for you. Maybe you've already cultivated a

life of prayer. Consider mentoring others in that kind of life. Imagine what our church would be if each of us cultivated this habit of prayer. Imagine what our community would be like if we followed Jesus in praying for each other, our community, and our world.