

What a SOUL NEEDS

We know a lot about how to care for our bodies. Our diet and exercise habits are well-informed. But what about our souls? Most problems are soul problems. Your soul is your deepest you—and God loves your deepest you. How do we take care of our souls? We need to nourish our inner lives and become people whose hearts, minds, wills and bodies are integrated and whole. This summer, we look to the middle chapters of Matthew to discover what the soul needs to find health and peace—resting in the hands of a God who loves us.

PURPOSE • Matthew 10:32-39 • Katie Fowler • July 2, 2017

Our souls crave purpose. The soul, the deepest part of you, desires to be about something.

There was a book by Rick Warren that came out 15 years ago called *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Published in 2002, by 2007 it had sold over 30 million copies. It was on the New York Times bestseller list for years. It's the second most translated book in the world. According to Barna research, by 2005, nearly ¼ of all American adults had read the book. The author's wife Kay Warren said when she was reading the unfinished manuscript she knew it was good, but she said, "I was clueless as to how deeply the book would strike a nerve in the souls of millions of people around the globe."

Our souls – the deepest part of who we are – crave purpose. Where is the life that matters to be found? Where is the life brimming with meaning? What's the purpose of my life? These are questions of utmost importance. And the good news that we discover in our passage today is that the life we crave is found in the life laid down. The life we crave is found in surrender to Jesus.

"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'

³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:32-39)

Does my life have purpose? I was sitting with a friend this week who was asking that very question. I believe it is one of the deepest questions of our soul. And to answer it, we go about what we call soul-searching.

We are busy people, and our world is loud. But even so, these moments of soul-searching come. Maybe in the quiet of the night when you can't sleep, or when you are in the thick of a crisis. Perhaps as you stare at your cup of morning coffee, or go about the grind of your daily routine, maybe in the midst of a new life stage. These questions pop up. What is my life about? What is life about? Is there more to life than this? Does my life have purpose? These are soul questions. It is our soul crying out. Your soul – the deepest part of you – was made to be about something. In other words, we long for a life of meaning.

Our first guess, our first attempt at securing purpose, a life brimming with meaning, is to focus on ourselves. Dig down deep and drum up the answers yourself. Look to yourself, se-

cure it yourself, build it yourself. I know, soul, I know the answer – focus on me. *Bless me, o my soul, and all that is within me. Bless me, and forget not all my benefits.* Of course, we would never put it that way or say it that directly.

But we walk out the door and go about our day, seeking to secure life on our own terms. I am really astonished how often this is true for me – my comfort, my security, my possessions, my stuff, my success, my accomplishments, my pursuit of the life I desire, my ability to make it happen.

I have been told that becoming a first-time parent can be very disorienting. Whereas before you could focus on yourself – what do I need to get done today, when do I want to take a shower, when do I want to eat dinner, when do I want to sleep – now you have this little baby who is so cute, but so needy and so demanding. And that can be a hard adjustment because we are used to focusing on ourselves. Aren't we? I am used to making it about me.

It reminds me of the strategy board games: Risk, Settlers of Catan, even Monopoly. You set up your pieces, you work the board, you try to acquire all the resources you need and you build your empire. Your thought is, of course, that's how you win the game. We live like that. It's my life – it is up to me to set up all my pieces on the game board. I will find the life, secure the life, and achieve the life I desire. But as a friend pointed out recently, winning and losing looks so very different in the kingdom of God. Jesus says that way of life doesn't lead to winning; that's actually how you lose. When you spend all your energy trying to secure life on your own, make your own life, on your terms, apart from God. You will lose your life in the process. The first part of verse 39 says, "Whoever finds their life will lose it."

I heard the story last week about a man named A.J. He said when he was in college he went to the bookstore and looked through a book that named college degrees and top earning potential. And he scoured it until he found his degree. In his 20s, he made it to New York and was a successful Wall Street broker. He thought you win by how many zeros are at the end of your paycheck. He said my life was about winning with a capital W. And then one day his boss called him into his office and told him he was getting a promotion, becoming a junior partner in the firm. A.J. realized everything he had worked for was being handed to him with even more zeros at the end of his paycheck. A.J. went back to his office, closed the door, and he just wept. He realized he was trapped. He feared a loss of ever having a life of purpose and meaning.

As we think this summer about what the soul needs, we find that when our focus is on ourselves, the soul becomes bent in on itself. You see our souls were meant for a far nobler, grander purpose, something bigger and greater than ourselves. But when our souls are bent only on our comfort, our self-preservation – when it's just about me, grabbing what I can, securing what I can, fixing, arranging life for me – Jesus says that's going to cave in on you.

I am from Florida and in Florida, on top of alligators, hurricanes, mosquitoes, roaches and 100% humidity – it really is a nice place to live by the way – on top of that we have sinkholes. John Ortberg tells the story of a man whose family had lived in the same house for decades. And then one day, a sinkhole opened up underneath their home's foundation, and this

man lost his life as the sinkhole swallowed him up along with his house. (John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, pg. 99) The image of a car being swallowed up by a sinkhole is the picture of a soul focused on itself. Ultimately it caves in on us. Trying to secure life on our own is tragically perilous.

The book *The Purpose-Driven Life* begins with these four words. "It's not about you." Could that be some of the most freeing words you and I will ever hear? You see, your soul was made for something bigger. The life we were made for, the purpose our soul craves, the very restoration of our souls is found only in Jesus – in the vastness of His life and love and purposes for us, in the greatness of our King and His Kingdom.

Only Jesus can rescue us. Only Jesus can take our souls bent in, caving in on themselves, and restore us.

Only Jesus. Only Jesus who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made Himself nothing. Only Jesus who was fully faithful to God the Father and led the perfect human life.

Only Jesus who humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross. Yes, only Jesus who took up His cross, scorning its shame and for the joy that was set before Him endured it all.

Only Jesus who laid down His life for us, even when we were running in the other direction, wanting nothing to do with God. Only Jesus who lost His life for our sake that we might find life, that we might have life abundant, life eternal. Jesus who loved us and gave Himself up for us. Only Jesus who died that we might be dead to sin and alive to God. Only Jesus – the Crucified and Risen One who sits on the right hand of the throne of God and even now invites us into the life of His Kingdom. That's why our response to Him matters for eternity. "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33)

That's why all other loyalties, all other allegiances take a distance back seat in comparison to Jesus.

We see that throughout our passage today. And then Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:38-29)

Does my life have meaning? Purpose? These are soul questions. In our passage, Jesus says you've got to lay down your life for my sake. It's surrender. That's where the life you were made for is found – a life of purpose, of meaning, a life with God. The life we crave is found in the life laid down.

My friend Raheel was born in Pakistan to a devout Muslim family. By the time he was 14, he had memorized half the Quran. He did all he could to be the perfect Muslim. But he felt something was missing. He had a longing in his heart to know if God is real. If so, he wanted to experience Him. He ended up going to Baylor University on a free ride scholarship. He told me he found himself in a sea of Baptists. One night during the 2nd semester of his freshman year, he began to pray, "God, I know you are real and I want to worship you, but I don't know how. Tell me. I want to follow you, but you have to tell me how." This was a moment of brokenness for him. I don't know what to do. I need someone to tell me what my purpose is. In

my brokenness I need someone to show me. His roommate was a strong follower of Christ and he had purposefully placed his Bible in their dorm room where Raheel could find it.

One night, Raheel thought, "What should I do tonight?" He decided to read the Bible. He opened to the beginning of John's Gospel and he read it. It all made sense to him. He started to read through the rest of the gospels with his roommate, then through the book of Romans and eventually through most of the New Testament. He started to feel he was connecting with God. His roommate gave him a Bible to keep. Raheel hid it in his suitcase for when he was at home that summer.

In September of his sophomore year, Raheel said, "I want to follow Jesus." After he made that choice and surrendered his life to Christ, he felt convicted that he needed to tell his parents. He knew that was going to be a problem. He thought "Should I email them? Call them? Wait until Christmas?" He decided to wait until Christmas break. His friends said, "Are you sure you want to tell them?" Raheel said, "What am I going to do, deny Christ?" So one night over Christmas break, he walked into his parents' bedroom and told them he loved them, and that he had decided to follow Jesus. He was told to get out of the house. His dad said, "If you walk out the door, you are no longer my son."

Raheel knows what Jesus means when He said His Gospel would be like a sword, dividing even families.

Raheel knows what Jesus means when He says, if you want to find your life, you have to lose it. Raheel went back to school after break. On his birthday that year, he was baptized. The church around him said if you need a family, you can be our son.

For the past 16 years, my friend, Raheel has been on the journey of following Jesus. In his life, God has been restoring his soul. In worship, in service to others, as Raheel lives in the community of God's people, his life reflects the goodness and grace and glory of God. The beauty of the Kingdom of God. This is the life we were made for.

Raheel's life verse, which echoes so much of our passage today, is Philippians 3:7-12.

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

That's the life we were made for. The good news of the Kingdom rings out in our passage today. We don't have to try and secure life or build it up on our own. No, the life we long for, the purposeful life, the meaningful life is found in surrender to Jesus. Moment by moment, day by day. Pick up your cross and follow. The life we crave is found in the life laid down.

Following Jesus, swept up in the purposes of God – to know Christ, to experience the life and love of Jesus, to spend our lives on this, to give our lives in response to the mercy of our God, our very souls reflecting the goodness, the grace, the glory of our God – that’s the life we were made for. That’s the life we were saved for – to glorify God and enjoy God forever. “Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, how great Thou art.” (Stuart K. Hine, *“How Great Thou Art”*)

Wherever you find yourself, whatever season of life you are in, whatever the circumstances around you, whoever surrounds you – what does it look to say “My soul magnifies the Lord?” It doesn’t mean we make God bigger than He actually is. But our lives are like a mirror reflecting God for who God actually is – the goodness and grace and glory of our God revealed in Jesus Christ. Right where you are, whether you are 8 years old or 88 years old, your life was meant to point to Jesus.

John Ortberg, in another of his books, tells the story of a woman named Linda. She is a bus driver in San Francisco. Driving her route day after day, she sees people. She really sees people, learning their names, helping them, treating them with dignity and respect – even the people with bad days and bad attitudes. People go out of their way to get on her bus. They pass up on another bus that is right in front of them because they want to wait to ride hers. She said in it all, she puts God first. Right where she is, bus driver on bus #45 in San Francisco, California, she is reflecting the goodness and grace and glory of our God revealed in Jesus Christ. (John Ortberg, *All the Places to Go*)

It is astonishing to me how often I can fall back to this notion that it’s all about me or it is up to me to secure my life. But Jesus keeps inviting me, inviting us, into a different way – a way of surrender, a way of trusting Him to make something beautiful out of my life.

Chuck Colson once put it like this: “Knowing that we are fulfilling God’s purpose is the only thing that really gives rest to the restless human heart.”

My soul magnifies the Lord.

Last week, John talked about the importance of silence. We don’t always like silence. It can feel awkward at first. But as our service concludes, we are going to move into a time of silent prayer. I invite you to spend some talking with God, to pray this prayer and whatever else you need to say to God. I encourage you to pray with your hands open in a posture of surrender.

Lord, my life is found in You.

My soul magnifies You, Lord.

I confess I have tried to find meaning and purpose apart from You.

Thank You, for laying down Your life for me, Jesus.

Help me to trust You and lay down my life for Your sake. Amen.

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STUDY GUIDE

“What a Soul Needs: Purpose” • Matthew 10:32-39

Start It

- Let’s start with a simple game. A pencil is made for what? Writing, of course. How about a spoon? Eating! (Especially for eating ice cream). Now, it is going to get harder. What about you? Your life. Your soul. What’s the purpose for your soul, the deepest part of you? Have you ever asked that before? *What’s the purpose for my life?* How would you answer that question? What do you think God would say about the purpose of your life?

Study It

- Read Matthew 10:32-39. What word or phrase jumps out to you?
- Read Matthew 10:32-33 again. What is Jesus telling His disciples? Scholar Dale Bruner says, “Our stand before the Father is determined by our stand for or against Jesus in the presence of other people.” What does it mean to stand for Jesus? How does Jesus stand for us?
- Read Matthew 10:34-37 again. What does it mean that Jesus didn’t come to, “bring peace, but a sword?” How are family relationships impacted by Jesus and His message?
- In our passage, Jesus speaks a lot about our loyalty to Him. Read Matthew 10:37-39. According to our passage, what does loyalty to Jesus demand? What does it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus?
- Read Matthew 10:39 one more time. What does it mean to lose our life for the sake of Jesus? Jesus’ words point us to the reality that the life we were made for is found in surrender. Our lives are not our own. We belong to Jesus. The life of purpose, the life we were made for is found in Christ, which means our lives are not spent focusing on ourselves, but on Jesus. What does it mean to surrender to Jesus? What does it look like to do this daily? In pointing to Christ in our daily lives, how are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were made?
- Read Psalm 63:1-5. How does the psalmist highlight our purpose as human beings?

Pray It

Lord, thank you for rescuing us – for bringing us back to life. We are Your handiwork, created anew to do good works, which You have prepared in advance for us to do. You have bestowed dignity upon our lives. Help us to live as faithful witnesses to You, Christ Jesus. May You be exalted. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Live It

Before you drink your coffee, brush your teeth, or check your phone, begin each day this week with a simple prayer that Jesus would be glorified in you that day.