

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • AUGUST 23, 2020
“IT’S ALL ABOUT SOUL”

Song of Focus
“The Blessing of Peace”
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

What good is it if you gain the whole world,
if in doing that you lose your soul?
Come, my child, and worship; bow down to the Lord.
Let God’s Spirit fill your life and make you whole.

Whether lifting joyful praise to the Lord your God
or bowed in supplication on your knees,
give your life to Jesus, who gave his life for you.
You’ll be filled with the blessing of true peace.

O come, let us adore him!
O come, let us adore him!
O come, let us adore him!
Christ, the Lord!

The Scripture
Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

The Message
It’s All About Soul: Peace
Mark Briley

Synopsis: Any physician will tell you that rest is important. Weary bodies need to recuperate to find energy for living again. Spiritually, many note that *“On the seventh day [of creation] God rested.”* Our rest found in making God our refuge is a trust that becomes an act of worship. It is a time of focused listening, trusting that the scrambling of our work is not needed. Instead, it is a trust that the One who began a good work through us will be faithful to complete it. In this trust, there is peace.

“For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?” (Matthew 16:26)



The Information Age has our brains going full steam, trying to process every tidbit of information that is thrown at us. Like, for example, we get daily updates: *“There are this many active COVID cases in Boone County right now.”* *“Good to know,”* we think. But the information just keeps pouring in, and we start to wonder how much brain space we can give to all that we’re trying to process. Some facts and insights seem potentially useful, and so we store it somewhere for later use.

I read an article that was promoting what they called *“useless, but good-to-know facts.”*¹ Sometimes, I think my kids laugh at me when I try to tell them something *I* think could be helpful, and they offer back a kind but potentially patronizing response, *“Good to know, Dad. Good to know.”*

I’ll show you, *‘good to know,’* right? Anyway – this article offered some of those seemingly unnecessary good-to-know-facts. Like what. Well, a regulation golf ball has 336 dimples. *Good to know?* John Lennon’s first girlfriend was named Thelma Pickles. *Good to know?* They offered others in their list of hundreds like: It’s estimated that at any given time 0.7% of the world’s population is intoxicated. *“Good to know,”* they say. Or... On average, 12 newborns will be given to the wrong parents every day. Wow. *Maybe* good to know. Or... the fact that coconuts kill more people every year than sharks do... maybe a little obscure, but tell me you won’t think about that next time you’re under a palm tree. *Good to know?*

Scripture is full of *“good to know”* truths, too – insights we know have some important application even when we can’t pinpoint its purpose at any given moment. Proverbs is full of them. The 27th Proverb says, *“Whoever blesses their neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.”* That’s some helpful good-to-know advice. Don’t mow the lawn or jam your tunes or yell over the fence at your neighbor before they’ve had their coffee, right? *Good to know.*

¹ This article and the good-to-know inspired motif comes from the research of Bob Kaylor, Senior Writer of *Homiletics*, and Senior Minister of the Park City United Methodist Church in Park City, Utah.

And Jesus was full of this stuff. Almost everything he shared upended some widely held assumption that we've since built our lives around. Matthew 16 is a prime example. No matter how many times you hear it read or study it or even preach it, they come across as tough teachings. To this point in time, Jesus has been out there changing the world with miracles and healings and sweet parables that he could have sold tickets to hear. And just moments before this chapter, Peter wakes up to the claim that "*Jesus is the Messiah.*" Boom. Game changed. Tons of positive momentum until all this weird stuff comes up in Matthew 16.

Jesus starts talking about sacrifice and his pending death and the way things were going to go down. It was like the Disciples suddenly realized they were at a strange party during a pandemic without masks and nobody was social distancing. Awkward! And it was. But there was also an edge of truth they came to ponder in all this talk about losing your life and finding your life. The significant one to our *All About Soul* series is found in that twenty-sixth verse: "*What good is it to gain the whole world but lose your soul.*"

This, my friends, is a matter of peace. We often don't think peace is possible until we gain the whole world... and so we add layer upon layer upon layer to our lives until our soul... that original center of our very-being... is so covered up we can't even find it any more. America is thick in so many of these layers right now. Is it any wonder we're struggling to find the soul of our nation? This is surely what Jesus means in gaining the world but losing the soul.

Donald Miller in his book, "*Scary Close*"² shares about this discovery in his own life. The third chapter says it all: "*Everybody's Got a Story and It's Not the One They're Telling.*" You've seen this idea on bumper stickers. You know like, "*Be kind for everyone you meet is battling something you know nothing about.*" Same kind of deal. In this chapter, Don talks about going to Onsite, which is a retreat center of sorts outside of Nashville. He described it as therapy camp for adults. He knew some songwriters who had burned out, gone to Onsite, and returned ready to write again. Another friend had gone trying to figure out why he had so many screwed up relationships and the workshops on codependency and shame were helpful. While feeling a little vulnerable about going, because he was a bit of a public figure who'd written best-selling books and felt like he should be able to resolve his own issues, he went anyway. He accepted that struggle was a part of everyone's story. So he joined about 40 others at this camp. Looking around the circle upon arrival, he said, "*I began to wonder what the other inmates were in for.*" He had a couple of roommates. He asked the first, "*What are you in for?*" He had come to Onsite, because he destroyed his marriage and his company by telling lies. He said he didn't know why he lied except

² *Scary Close* by Donald Miller. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 2014. All the stories shared from his book in this message are from the aforementioned third chapter.

he wanted to impress people. Don said, *“I immediately trusted him. I felt like I could tell him anything. I didn’t but I felt like I could.”* Their other roommate let them know within two minutes of walking in the door that he was a master at Karate. He could get a guy on the floor in one move and snap his neck instantly. He made a big swooshing sound as he described the move. Not quite sure all of Karate’s moves were real. What’s hiding under that macho exterior?

So they all turn in their cell phones and start with their first session. Bill led the first session. He had been through the program at Onsite himself and was now back leading it. It just so happened Don wound up at Bill’s lunch table. *“That’s where my first breakthrough came,”* Don said. Don was making jokes, and Bill asked him if he knew where his entertainer gene came from. Don said he didn’t know. *“I just always felt the need to be smart or funny.”* Bill pulled out a napkin and drew a small circle on it. Inside the circle, he wrote the word soul and explained everybody is born a soul. You were. He was. We all were... born a happy little soul. Something happens in life that changes that.

Bill drew a larger circle around the small circle – it looked something like a target. Inside the second circle, he wrote the word *shame*. Bill said, *“At some point, I realized, whether true or not, there was something wrong with me. Either I didn’t measure up to the standards of my parents, or kids made fun of me, or I came to believe I was inferior. Shame,”* he said, *“caused me to hide. And that’s a problem. Because the more we hide, the harder it is to be known. And we have to be known to connect.”*

Then Bill drew another circle around the second one and said this outer circle was the false self we create to cover our shame. *“Some call this personality or a character we learn to play thinking we only matter if we’re attractive or powerful or skilled. In any case, you generally have some ace card you believe will make you loveable.”* Even before Bill asked, Don blurted out the word *humor*. Bill looked at the napkin and wrote humor in the outer circle. He didn’t look back up either. He just waited, hovering above the circle with his pen until Don said, *“intelligence”* and Bill wrote that word in the outer circle, too. He added a few more words and Bill then held up the napkin before Don like a mirror. *“I was a soul, covered in shame and hiding behind an act,”* he thought. The lie becomes, *“I only matter if...”* Bill points to that center circle, at the word ‘soul’, and says, *“This guy, your soul, is the part of you that gives and receives love; that creates ultimate peace in your life. The outer rings are just theater.”*

We will not know peace when we’re living in those outer, theatrical circles. You could write your own words in that outer circle – the things that cover up your soul and that ultimately hinder your peace. It’s like Jesus saying, *“You can gain the whole world... you can fill that outer circle with all of the shiny things of this world... but if that’s all you’ve got, you’ll lose your soul.”* Good to know, right?

Claiming that soul circle is like falling in love. It only works... falling in love only happens... when you mine through the layers of your life, and that of another, to get at the soul... the true you. For some reason... this is really hard. It's hard to be vulnerable. It's hard to be who your soul truly knows you are because of our fear of rejection.

In Matthew 16, we see Jesus pushing through these layers in a way like we had yet to see in Matthew's Gospel. It was starting to get real. The Disciples had been building an image around Jesus' ministry. They were becoming more entourage than disciple... more concerned with keeping Jesus with a shiny image than listening to his teaching and following the sacrificial realities of his leading. Their Jesus had become too safe. Is your Jesus too safe?

So, when Jesus began to talk about losing your life and finding your life and carrying a cross, Peter says what may be our own inclination: *"No way, Jesus. You're talking crazy."* And so we defend. We cut off ears when people step to our Jesus just as Peter would do to the soldier in the garden. But Jesus doesn't need us to *protect* him or *defend* him but to *follow* him. We're disciples, not members of his entourage. We often think there is a better, shinier path for this Christian walk, so we try to package the faith in a neatly tied, hip, clean, skinny-jeaned fashion. Jesus says, *"Not the way, guys."* He says, *"To find yourself, you've got to be willing to lose yourself."* This is good to know, right?

To remember who you truly are, to be your authentic self, you've got to lose the outer layers – the theater – the role you've come to play in your life as fully put together, heroic, cross-fit, sparkling smiled, faith super star. Jesus reminds us that in broken world, everything is backwards. We discover the greatness of God when we experience our human limitations. We fight against the truth in a million different ways. But... in reality... God's grace is located at the end of our rope, not the top of it. Good to know. But are we ready for that?

My friend and colleague, Brad McDowell, is a pastor in Wilmington, North Carolina³. He offered an honest, inner circle soul word about readiness this week. He said, *"Readiness is overrated."* Good to know! He followed it with this: *"My kids are not ready for at-home school. I am not ready to be their facilitator. The schools are not fully ready for this either. In church, we sometimes say that kids can't take communion until they're 'ready,' but what does that mean? Some Sundays, I don't feel ready for communion, but I'm so thankful I get to take it anyway."* Brad goes on: *"I wasn't ready to get married at 24. I wasn't ready to lead a church at 27. I wasn't ready to become a dad at 29, or at 31, or at 36. I couldn't be ready because I didn't really know Lisa or even myself before I got married. I couldn't be ready because I didn't know my kids or their gifts or their*

³ Rev. Brad McDowell serves First Christian Church in Wilmington, NC. He shared this word on his Face Book page this week.
<https://fccilm.org/>

*needs. Readiness is overrated. The question should be: are you **committed**? Are you willing to invest yourself fully even when it's hard? Are you open to the bucket loads of God's grace that you'll need to receive while you're figuring it out? Because spoiler alert... you're always figuring it out. You never stop figuring it out. We're all trying to build the airplane while we're hurtling through the sky, hoping it comes together before we crash. But the truth and beauty of the Gospel is that we're not building it alone. God wants our help, but God never abandons us in this work. The ones I've seen have the most success and most fun at this are the ones who laugh at their mistakes and always, always accept God's help and grace along the way."*

That's good to know. It's not about readiness. It's about commitment. That seems to be Jesus' point, too, when he's talking about the cost of discipleship – it's not about readiness because you're probably never fully ready for any leap of faith. It's about commitment – at the soul level – to say, *"I'm in. I'm in for the ups and downs of the journey. I'll make room for others. I'll give of myself for the whole without expecting any of the credit. I'll give up every perception I think the world wants out of me if it means I'll be at peace with my soul."*

The Church Universal has already been under suspicion by many who have been rejected by the church, burned by its hypocrisy, questioning its authenticity. Is the church really following Jesus or more concerned with maintaining an institution guided by outer circle theatrics?

This moment in Jesus' ministry was like the moment we face now. Jesus was wondering if the disciples were committed to cutting through the layers... get to the truth... and live a life of soul. COVID sort of cuts through the layers of appearances, too. There's no shine to the church in a pandemic. We can try to say we've got this polished version of church that is firing on all cylinders, claiming the Spirit is the greatest prescription for the virus ... sort of in the healing quality vein of only true prescription: *'more cowbell.'* The truth? We're doing our best to show up every day... be love in the world and grace to the mess. And like Jesus, we're wondering day in and day out who's up for it all over again? Are you in?

My boys have really gotten into football card collecting this summer. I admit that it's taken me back a bit to those years in my own life, and I still get a little flutter before they open another pack of cards. Who you gonna get? Will it be a rare specialty card? And if we're in the car, they've cracked the pack already and are going through the cards... naming each one as they thumb through them as I listen with wide open ears from the driver's seat. They name them calmly at first... *"Jared Goff purple press proof... yes... J.T. Watt Color Rush... sweet."* They get a little louder... *"Peerless Price All Hands team... yes!"* And then it's... *"Travis Kelce... Let's go! Tyreek Hill... Let's go! Gold Press Proof MVP super-duper Patrick Mahomes ... "Let's go!!!"* They're just names, but it's like a roll call.

And it's how I feel when I think of you. We're still getting to know each other... but we're invested. And when I come across your name... I see you at worship... I learn of your showing up for another in need. I see pictures of you at the Habitat Build or you join the CareLink team to send cards to our people who need to be encouraged. I call your name and I say, "*Let's go!*" This is the truth Jesus was running by the disciples. The cost is high. It will be an investment. You'll have to lose some things to find some others. You'll have to sacrifice to experience the soul gains. It'll cost you... and that's good to know. But it's the only way to peace in your soul. For you no longer have to hide behind the theatrics. You don't have to put on a mask... well... you might have to put on a mask but not the masquerade kind of mask. You just show up, be the real you, give others the gift of being true to themselves and peace will come. Everybody's got a story, and it may not be the one they're telling.

Don Miller, soaking in the three circles Bill had drawn on that napkin, went back to his room that first night at Onsite and was having trouble sleeping. His roommates were struggling, too. The guy who told the lies said he'd already broken down in one of the small groups. He said he missed his ex-wife and couldn't believe he'd thrown it all away. Don said, "*I asked Karate if he'd learned anything that day, and he was quiet for a while. He finally said he wasn't sure about all this sensitive stuff. He said his nature was to fight through everything. He got up to use the restroom but left a crack in the door and the light shone through back toward his bed.*" The other roommate made a tapping sound to get Don's attention. Don looked over and his roommate was pointing to Karate's bed. "*No kidding,*" Don said, "*right by his pillow was an old, worn-out teddy bear. Karate slept with a teddy bear. Unbelievable. I swear I loved the guy after that,*" Don said. "*Sometimes the story we're telling the world isn't half as endearing as the one that lives inside us.*"

What would it take for you to live from that layer? ... the true you... the soul level? What gift would it be for your family, your friends, your colleagues, your neighbors, your own soul? You know what I think that gift would be? What that gift is? *Peace*. And that, in my humble opinion, is good to know.