

**Soul Station – Maintenance and Repair
Motivation Transformation**

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Mark 10:17-22 – Sell what you have and give to the poor.

John 3: 1-4 – You must be born over again.

Romans 12:2 – Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...

So here we are, our first Sunday at our new theme, “Soul Station”. Wouldn’t it be great if getting our spiritual energy and maintaining our spiritual practice were as simple as going to the gas station to fill up and tune up? The bad news is that our spiritual life is a little more complicated than that. The good news is that it can be done. This church is a soul station. Our energy, while coming via the Middle East also includes a great variety of alternative energy sources. The even better news is that the source of our energy is unlimited, and the cost of an average pledge for an entire family is significantly less than the annual price of our family cars, the gas to drive them and repairs to maintain them. Yet even as good a deal as this church is, many of us still avoid the regular maintenance offered here in lieu of what I grew up knowing as the Jersey tune up.

I learned the Jersey tune up from my father. My dad was something of a sucker for the newest gimmick car in its first year of production. This is a trait which I inherited from him which led me to buy a VW Rabbit and a Plymouth Reliant K-car, each in its inaugural year before I learned my lesson.

In the early 1970’s my dad bought an Audi Fox. The best thing you could say about that car was that it had front wheel drive and handled well. It must also be said, however, that it was not yet fit for mass production. When started in the morning, the Fox would regularly cough and sputter and choke to a halt. Rather than take it in for service, my dad used what was called the Jersey tune up in my part of the country. This consisted of simply sitting in the driveway, putting the car in neutral, and flooring the accelerator until the car cleared out whatever was fouling its plugs, points or carburetor. Unfortunately, the Jersey tune up worked just often enough to make my dad think he had fixed the problem. This delusional success produced in my family a long lasting denial that cars actually needed professional maintenance.

Today, I feel like we often resort to the equivalent of the Jersey tune up in our spiritual lives. We may recognize something’s not right with our souls, but we deal with it by racing our spiritual engines at full

speed, blowing all kinds of debris out our exhaust pipes, while in reality getting nowhere and doing more damage than good.

I promise not to beat this gas station metaphor to death, but for the next five weeks, Sandy, Andy and I will look at how we can fuel, maintain, and when necessary, repair our spiritual practices to keep our souls energized. Underlying it all, we remind you that this church is and always will be your soul station.

So let's begin today by looking at what motivates a deeper spiritual journey. I see two paths.

First of all, think of why you came to this church? What was going on in your life? What brought you here, and what were you seeking?

You may have been running on empty, or cruising on very low fuel. You probably recognized some kind of need in your life, something missing.

Now ask yourself about other moments of significant change or growth in your life. What prompted them? Again, for many of us, it was a crisis, a sense of emptiness, a question of whether that's all there is.

Bad times often motivate change. We deal with an addiction when we've hit rock bottom. We decide to get rid of a bad habit when we realize it's turning us into someone we don't recognize and don't want to be. We establish a new, healthy lifestyle after a heart attack or serious illness catches our attention. We change our study or work habits after we flunk out of school or lose a job. A sense of emptiness causes us to look deeper into our spiritual life, or at least it should. In fact we're lucky if it does, because there is also I believe in us an equal tendency to try to fill our empty places with work, money, things that cost money, food, alcohol, and drugs. It's no secret, but it's worth reminding ourselves, that one night of TV will try to convince us that the happiest people are those who just bought an expensive car, took a really big ticket trip with their master card, got just the right trendy clothes, set up a new, flat-screen TV and are drinking beer, or if too young for beer, eating Lucky Charms.

The world's great religions recognize that our most natural response to discomfort is a craving for what will ultimately do us the most harm. In his book, Essential Spirituality, Roger Walsh says the key to spiritual practice is to "Transform your motivation; reduce craving and find your soul's desire."

In Christian scripture, when a rich young man comes to Jesus asking about the spiritual life, Jesus tells him to love God and neighbor, **and** give up his addiction to wealth. Hinduism says that in balancing the need for things that give us a comfortable life, our sensual desires, and our moral and religious duties, we find release and enlightenment. Buddhism reminds us of the tyranny of attachments and encourages a middle path. Mohammed says, "Free yourself from greed, for greed itself is an impoverishment."

Step one in the spiritual journey is examining and transforming your motivation for change. Some time this week when you find yourself

craving something that you don't really need, whether it's an extra snack, a Firehouse hook and ladder sub, chocolate, ice cream (I'm giving you my list here), working longer than you truly need to, going shopping, or any other way you address an ongoing need with a short term fix, stop and pay attention. Check and see if something is hurting or distressing you? What is your true need? Don't try to change anything, just pay attention.

Remember those little pocket notebooks we gave you on the way in. Keep it with you, and jot down what's going on in this time when you feel a little needy.

UCG folks constantly ask Sandy, Andy, and me for guidelines for a deepening spiritual practice. But it's tough for all of us, myself included, to follow through. Today, be aware of the first step, motivation. Be aware that motivation often needs to be transformed, to take us away from our natural cravings, or from the Jersey tune up for the soul, to come instead to the soul station for your soul.

I asked you to think of what brought you to church, what motivated most of the good changes in your life. In many cases it was emptiness, a need, something missing.

The other half of Roger Walsh's sentence, after transforming motivation and reducing craving is "find your soul's desire."

It's also important to recognize that at times we find our spiritual energy, our soul station by pursuing something we truly love, something trying to be born within us.

One of the powerful spiritual practices of my life, as you know, is music, and specifically the trumpet. When I was a child we traveled every summer from New Jersey to Kansas to visit family. One night, on the summer when I was eight years old, my uncle, a high school band director in Stafford, Kansas, brought home a trumpet. It was like someone had plugged me into a new energy source. I was fascinated by that trumpet. Even though I knew nothing about playing it I couldn't leave it alone. My uncle noticed this, told my dad I might have some talent, and sent me an old horn when I got back to New Jersey. It was like finding home in a place I had never been before.

Earlier I suggested that when we find ourselves in a place of neediness or emptiness that leads to an unhealthy craving, to stop and pay attention. Here's a second suggestion. On the next day when the same thing happens again, stop when the craving comes and think of doing something you love, something that truly nurtures your body and your soul if just for a moment. For me it would be playing trumpet or guitar, or taking a walk, finding a place of quiet, watching the birds in my feeder, and healing my heart. Find something like that and do it instead of, say, snacking.

Write in your journal what your joy would be and how it transforms your motivation. Mickey Singer says, "Once you see what this

can do to your life you are ready for spiritual growth... for real transformation.” (The Untethered Soul, p. 18)

Then think as well of times and places where you found your soul’s desire in joy rather than need. In the gospel of John, Nicodemus, a religious leader comes to Jesus at night, a lot like my finding that trumpet at night, and asks Jesus about that deep, pure energy of God he senses in Jesus. And Jesus says it’s a matter of being born from above, like rebirth. We don’t learn exactly what Nicodemus did with this information, but after Jesus had died and his body was being taken by Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb, Nicodemus appears with about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloe to anoint the body of Jesus. Something had been reborn in Nicodemus.

As I said, wouldn’t it be nice if we could just take our souls to the soul station and pump in ten gallons of fuel? If we understand the fuel we need, we can find it. Just as we’re learning we can’t rely on Middle Eastern oil as our only energy source, so today we can know that there are unlimited, renewable sources of energy for the soul in the world’s great faiths, in the great book of God’s creation, in the gifts of doing what’s right and serving others, in healing the heart and learning how to live, in finding ways to calm the mind and slow down, and being aware of all that is within and around, and in of course, in one of my personal favorites, laughter. We’ll be addressing all of these resources in our coming worship services here at UCG, a soul station for each of our lives.

This week, remember your needs, how your cravings can sidetrack your soul, and how to transform those cravings into a visit to the soul station where you can find your spiritual energy. Remember how joy motivates your spiritual practice. And remember to avoid the Jersey tune up for your soul, so that one way or another you may take your foot off the accelerator of life’s endless quest for money, power, and total physical comfort, to find yet another better way. Or as the apostle Paul puts it, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... (That you may discern what is the will of God, which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Prayer –

O Holy Power of the light that overcomes the darkness, I pray today for motivation to transform my life, rather than let myself just drift along. I pray in silence for a sense of what is deeply important in my life right now, what really matters...

And given this, what would I better off doing more of with my life?

What would I be better off doing less of?

May I find my soul station, O holy Source, to move my life more deeply into what matters, to do that which I most want to be doing, to let go of that which is doing me no good.

Open me to your transforming gifts, O God of change, deep in my heart, offered by my friends, and present in this gathering of faith.

Show me your light. Amen.