

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

August 23, 2026 ***“Beauty: The Beauty of Selflessness. “Is there something bigger than me that I can live for?”***

I Intro.

There's a lot going on at NCC and you'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

We're taking the idea of what beauty is from Dostoevsky's quote from *“The Idiot”*. (1869) ***“Beauty will save the world.”*** Dostoevsky had a deep and profound Christian faith. But he saw the religion he grew up with wasn't meeting people at their point of need. NCC was founded nearly 30 years ago to face the challenge of a changing world, and present the gospel in new ways. And we still need to keep changing to do that even today. Dostoevsky was noticing what was happening in his society, and wanted to address those issues.

What was happening in culture in 1869.

People were looking for something that would explain the mysteries and complexities of life. They were disillusioned, discouraged, seeking anything that would give them direction, guidance and hope. That struggling generation was looking for something to believe in and hold onto. Traditional religion wasn't doing it. So, Dostoevsky was proposing a spirituality, an understanding of God, that highlighted the natural elements of a life devoted to something significant and greater. He called this— ***“beauty”***. Dostoevsky was saying our role, task, was not to push the world into some form of moral conformity. Make everyone do what we think they should do. It wasn't just having people do religion harder. **But to draw people to Jesus by the saving beauty of Christ**. People who were searching, would see in the followers of Jesus, practicing the disciplines we find in a life devoted to Jesus, a life that they could find purpose in. Not forcing others to live a certain way. To convince them what they should do. But the beauty of living Jesus principles out in our daily lives.

George began this series with *“The Beauty of Generosity”*. The second week we hit *“The Beauty of Purpose”*. Last week was *“The Beauty of Honesty”*. Today, *“The Beauty of Selflessness”*.

III Sunday.

Okay, let's get real here, and talk about this: The curse of the unsatisfying pursuit.

Does this mean anything, bring anything specific to mind when you read this? ? Have you ever pursued something you thought you really wanted? Not that you thought it would satisfy every deep need, completely fix your life. But it was just that next stage, phase of life, in which you

would finally feel like you had arrived, fulfilled a dream, felt satisfied, everything would be okay. We'll say: *"Once I get out of school. Once I find a partner. Once I get that job/career I've always wanted. Once I make THIS much money. Once We have kids. Once the kids move out of the house. Once I can retire. Once I...."* Happiness, fulfillment, is just satisfying my felt needs— THEN I will be content.

We know that's all a lie— RIGHT?

What is it inside of us that keeps pursuing those things that for some reason, we believe will bring us?

It seems it almost always comes down to expectations.

What do we want out of life?

What are we expecting life to provide for us that will make us happy?

But even more: **Will I know I've found 'it', when I've found 'it'?**

It's chasing that one thing that we believe will fulfill some deep need within us. It's what Ecclesiastes calls just *"chasing the wind"*.

Here we go in our next *"beauty"*. I'm throwing this scripture out here, because we really don't know what it means, how to interpret it, and especially, how this would affect our daily lives. The choices we make. People we choose to be around. How we live day to day. I want us to wrestle with the ambiguity and lack of specifics with this passage. This passage feels more philosophical than it does practical or applicable. But we know it's important because it encapsulates the ministry of Jesus.

Mark 8:35-37. *If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?*^[e] Is anything worth more than your soul?

[e] Your self, or your life.

Hold onto those two other words in the [e] footnote, that help explain what your soul is. There are obvious questions that come from this passage.

What does hanging on to your life look like? What does giving up your life...for Jesus, look like?

And let's really get at it.

What is your soul, and can you really lose it? Lastly, why does this really matter?

We've already begun the conversation about our soul. The importance of preserving our soul, our 'self'. Let's hit what our soul is. Our soul is all of who we are. Our individual essences operating as one entity. Our divine spirit (the image of God), our mind, heart, body. Our soul is the unique 'us' that's born when all of these elements that make us up are joined together. Something is created that's bigger than each of these. In this work of designing our life that best cares for our soul, we have to include all of these elements. We have to do specific things, have regular habits and practices, that connects our spirit to God. That feeds our mind. That protects and nurtures our heart. And cares for our body so it can be a living sacrifice. Caring for our soul, through selflessness is a key understanding for today's *"beauty"*. And taking care of our soul is the same intentional work we often do to our physical body.

Living a selfless life requires a balance of caring for others, and caring for ourselves. Let's talk about the struggles of what it means to live selflessly. There is no secret formula to plug every situation into, and out pops the right answer. There will always be a tension between the two. **WHY?**

1. It's our natural instinct to think of ourselves first. Nothing wrong with this. It's built into us. It's how we're designed. It's necessary for our survival. It's in all of those elements of what makes up our soul. We see this care for self constantly in the life of Jesus. Jesus would go off and pray, be alone. He would escape the crowds and spend time with close friends for his own well-being. We have to understand and embrace this truth. In case of an emergency put the oxygen mask on... us first. We know that in some situations, we feel this thing rise up within us that demands we take care of ourselves. When you're trying to rescue someone who is drowning, if they're unwilling to let you help them, then you have to not try. For your own protection. Pretending we shouldn't care for ourselves is harmful. Because, if we don't acknowledge it, recognize our survival side when it's kicking in, that we actually do need to care for ourselves, we'll harm others in helping them. So, know this instinct is real, normal, and is not inherently bad. As with any God-given thing, how we're designed, we can use it to our own detriment. Or we can use this truth in how we help others selflessly.

2. We often don't know where the line is between selflessness and enabling. This is the tough one. Because, we can't always tell if we're really helping someone who needs us, or we just need to be needed. **Does this ring true with you?** Sometimes our attempt to live selflessly, to help others, we end up actually crippling them because our 'help' doesn't help them to learn to deal with things themselves. I'm going to address this specifically at the end. But I feel compelled to remind us this awareness is central to fully embracing this practice to live a beautiful life. And we all know of others who live beautifully selfless lives.

What makes selflessness 'done well' and beautiful? Don't lose the words and idea of "*done well*". **Selflessness is rooted in an outward focus.** This is the first charge in living selflessly.

Philippians 2:3-4. *Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.*

So... "*don't be selfish*". There...all done. In this short passage we see the heart of the beauty of selflessness. Living selflessly naturally begins with humility. Not doing selfless things for show, recognition, even to pat your own self on the back. We want to 'help' others, because they need it, but also you want it to be you who does it. This is the foundation, the heart of selflessness. A life of "*well done*" selflessness has to be rooted in the needs of others. The way you live is not to impress others, or satisfy your own need to be needed. Living selflessly is rooted in humility, and gratitude.

The interesting ending of verse 4. "*Don't ONLY look out for your own interests*". (You will need to look out for your own interests. That's the natural instinct within us). But take an interest in others— TOO, as you are aware of your own needs. This is the foundation for cooperation, collaboration, and a well oiled machine. Or "*the body*" that is united in Christ, Paul talked about. Seeing an outwardly focused group is such a beautiful thing. People in church who are willing to give up their own preferences for others. Worship style, music, lighting, sound, and more

Selflessness is seen in specific behaviors. Then one of the most famous passages spells out what the beauty of selflessness looks like. There are very specific, identifiable behaviors that are the root of selflessness. You've heard this passage a billion times before. It's the reason it's read at so many weddings. Anyone who has been married for more than 30 years will tell you this is what makes a marriage not only last, but work. Success in ANY relationship is rooted in selflessness. And it's okay to wince and grimace when you hear these. Some of these will be "*growth opportunities*" for you.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

I had to fight the urge to go over each one of these, and break them down into the Greek meaning, and how to apply them. But we do need to know how these tie into living a beautifully selfless life. Because selflessness is the life of loving others— in this specific way. Read it again but substitute the word “*selflessness*” for love when you read it. The first passage was the foundation, the root, where selflessness grows out of. This passage is how you see selflessness lived out in our daily lives.

IV Challenge.

I’m going to give you A, not the only, hack for the struggle between making sure we care for ourselves, and living selflessly. This is the serious work of caring for our soul. And not losing it. Bottomline truth: **Selflessness is the continual act of restoring the dignity and humanity of another person.** This is the answer to the tough question of; helping vs. enabling. We all struggle with at times. Here’s a little test to help you in all the situations you may find yourself in. Using the understanding; **selflessness is restoring the dignity of another person.** It’s the difference between “*I will help you in a situation that’s tough for you*” vs “*I will do for you what you need to learn to do for yourself*”. Let’s talk about the tension between helping and enabling. Sometimes restoring dignity is selflessly stepping in to help the other person. It’s Jesus stepping between the women caught in adultery and the Pharisees who wanted to stone her. And sometimes restoring dignity is encouraging the person to do their own work. When Jesus told the man to “*pick up your mat and walk*”. Unfortunately the line between the two is not clear. It’s fuzzy, complicated, and always changing. And you will sometimes just get it wrong. A good rule of thumb in living as selfless of a life as you can is asking the question.

In restoring another person’s dignity and humanity, is it better to step in and do it for them, or to encourage them to do it for themselves?

Honestly, that last part of the question is often THE most selfless thing you can do. It is beautiful to literally selflessly step in and help another. And also equally beautiful to be there as another person figures out how to help themselves. It’s a beautifully selfless thing because it doesn’t put you as the center of their growth. It gives them the personal satisfaction, joy, and sense of accomplishment of working through their issue. Letting them restore their own dignity. And its soul growth for them also. The question at the beginning was avoiding unsatisfying pursuits. To want to make our lives matter, have impact, make a difference. Living selflessly is a beautiful way to find the most satisfying pursuits ever. To help others work towards having their dignity restored, their image of God. It is giving up your life to save your soul.

And selflessness will absolutely save the world.