

Soul Training Exercises

from James Bryan Smith's *The Magnificent Story*

Embracing our Goodness - Chapter 5, Acts 11:22-24

"The basic human drive is the desire for the good" - John O'Donahue

The author speaks of being a friend to Rich Mullins, a Christian musician who wrote songs for others and eventually became famous himself. Smith tells of how friendship with Rich wound up including hearing about Rich's many difficult experiences involving relationships, drugs, self-abuse and more. It was hard to hear, and he could see that his friend regretted such behavior. And yet, there was also a beauty to the story. The raw pain revealed the human side, the cost of living in a broken and fallen world. And perhaps the greatest part of the story was that many of the difficult things Rich had shared, were sinful things that happened after he became famous. Smith was confronted with the great story, that despite our sin, sin is not our identity.

We sin every time we turn from God, self and others to seek solace in something that cannot deliver the promise it makes. Surrender is not a natural thing for us, and sin seems more the natural way to meet our needs. So we fight God for what we ultimately do not want, rather than to take what God offers, which is what we need.

We are all sinners, separated from God. We are capable of terrible things against God and others. We are all broken, weak and capable of great evil. And yet, there is so much more to us. We can love our neighbors, serve others, create beautiful art, and speak truth in love. That is beautiful. And that is good. While yes, we are fallen with original sin, we are also made in God's image, with original goodness. This means every time we sin, we distort God's likeness. We can't forget that while God said that each level of creation was "Good," it is recorded in Genesis that when He created humans, it was "Very Good." "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)."

Perhaps one of the greatest passages about this dynamic can be found in Romans 7:15, where Paul says "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate." This passage is sandwiched between chapters 6 and 8 where Paul speaks of freedom from sin and setting our minds on the things of the Spirit. Smith points out that Paul is using a literary device that makes the speech not about him, but about a general character, who is failing at keeping the law. This is not about Paul, this about us, who when confronted with our sin, say with Paul "Wretched man/woman that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? V.24"

What's at stake with all of us? How we see ourselves and others will impact how we relate to one another. If we see ourselves or others as worthless, we will act with disregard and disrespect. If we see them as persons of worth, we will respond with dignity and respect. Consider how Jesus treated the different people who came to Him. Each person possessed varying degrees of outward "goodness" and "sinfulness" but all garnered His respect and regard. Moved to compassion equally towards religious leaders and prostitutes, Jesus acknowledges what they do right and helps them see how they sin.

If we lay ourselves bare before Jesus, and before our friends who love and care for us, our relationships can become even stronger. As Smith points out, "Evil is counting on us to hide." And when we fully know and are known by God, sin pulls away, it loses its grasp and we become free.

- Excerpts from *The Magnificent Story* and observations from Pastor Tyler

Soul Training #5: Sound

The ongoing weekly challenge is to see how God woos us with beauty through our senses. Consider then, how you move from the "beauty you experience" towards God, the "Source of all beauty."

Take a moment to pray and remind yourself that God is present. Then enjoy some music that you find beautiful – whatever that genre and artist might be. Find a place without interruption and distractions. Maybe even sit in a darkened room where you can focus fully in on what you hear. As the music ends, give words of gratitude to God the giver of all beauty.

The Series

Date	Sermon – Speaker	Training
April 7	Discovering the Truth - Pastor Tyler Hartford	Smell
April 14*	Going the Distance - Pastor Ron Diener	Touch
April 21**	Making All Things New - Pastor Tyler Hartford	Taste

& Celebration

* Palm Sunday ** Easter

"Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and His love..."

As with any book, there are places where the views expressed may not always match our own. It's what to love about a book, as it provides a starting place for conversation and a catalyst for ideas and actions. We look forward to having important conversations, wrestling over details, and digging deep into important aspects of telling and living the Gospel story.

- Pastor Tyler

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