

Just Breathe

This year we designated January 1 as “Un-Resolution Sunday.” Instead of asking what more we could possibly say “yes” to, we focused on what we should be saying “no” to.

1. Warm up question. Tell us about a fun or special moment you experienced in the past couple weeks over the holidays.
2. When we think about New Year’s Resolutions, the options can be overwhelming. Even though most of us are already over-extended, we often feel like there’s more we could and should be doing. So we summon our will power and try to squeeze even more into life. But what if God’s saying, “I don’t want you to do more. I want you to do less.” A wise person once said, “We often feel bad about the things we have to say ‘no’ to. But you shouldn’t. You should actually feel good because it’s those ‘no’s’ that create the space in your life to say ‘yes’ to the most important things.” How does that quote sit with you? Like it or dislike it – and why?
3. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20. In this passage, shortly before his death, and as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses challenged the Israelites to make choices that would contribute to the quality of their life. His basic message was, “Hey Israelites, the choices you make will have serious consequences. God has not already predetermined your future. You get to choose. And the choices you make will either create a blessed life or a cursed life.” Do you believe that? Why or why not?
4. Given the power each of us has to shape our own future, Jeff challenged us to consider three key questions of self-examination. **Question 1: What unexamined assumptions deeply embedded in my psyche do I need to say ‘no’ to, because they’re distorting my life?** Jeff offered two examples. One from Frank Lloyd Wright’s uncle who tried to teach Frank to always walk in a straight line and never waste any time or energy wandering. Thankfully, Frank said ‘no’ to that advice, let his artistic imagination wander, and became a renowned architect. In the other example, Jeff told how a standardized test he took when he was a Freshman in high school convinced him he had very limited brain power and would have to work harder than everyone else to succeed. As a result, he internalized an extreme work ethic that, to this day, makes it hard for him to relax and to maintain balance in life.
 - a. Virtually all of us have internalized certain ways of thinking about life that tend to hold us back. For you, what might that be? Is there a certain habitual way of thinking that God might be calling you to reexamine and reject? If so, what is it?
 - b. Changing deeply embedded patterns of thought can be difficult. What are some practical things we can do to re-program unhelpful habitual thought patterns?
5. **Self-Examination Question 2: What kinds of material things do I need to say ‘no’ to, so I can live a happier, more balanced, less stressed life?** Because we’ve been raised in a culture that teaches that happiness is found in acquiring as much stuff as we can, we all tend to get caught up in that way of thinking. As a result, we tend to

live at (or beyond) our means and often experience financial stress and little room for generosity.

- a. Name something you wish you had that you don't now have. Do you think you'd be happier if you had it?
- b. We who live in America in the 21st century (even the poorest among us) are in the top 2% of wealth among the 80 billion people who've ever lived. We have more material prosperity than even the wealthiest person who lived a thousand years ago. The wealthiest person who lived a thousand years ago never rode in a car, never had surgery, never tuned on a light, never bought penicillin, never watched TV, had no indoor plumbing, never flew on a plane, never slept on an innerspring mattress, and never talked on a phone. Generally speaking, do you think we're happier today than people were a thousand years ago? How important – or not – do you think material prosperity is to happiness in life?
- c. Read Isaiah 55:2. What do you think this verse means?
- d. What kinds of material things do you feel called to say 'no' to, so you can live a happier, more balanced, less stressed life? Is there something specific God is calling you to do to be less materialistic?

6. Self-Examination Question No. 3: What “schedule buster” activities do I need to say ‘no’ to, so I can gain more room to breathe?

- a. The vast majority of Americans report feeling that they're way too busy and long for a more measured pace in life. How do you feel? If you feel too busy, why is that?
- b. In a recent survey, over 60% of American Christians said, “The busyness of life often – or always – gets in the way of developing my relationship with God.” How do you feel?
- c. Albert Schweitzer once said, “If your soul has no Sabbath, it becomes an orphan.” What do you think he meant?
- d. Name something really important in life that you feel you're not devoting enough time to. What would you have to say “no” to in order to make more room for that thing you feel called to invest more time in? Do you feel called to make the changes necessary to create that space?
- e. Have you had a chance yet to do the Soul Care Self-Assessment Inventory and develop a 2017 Soul Care Plan? If so, tell us something you feel called to say 'no' or 'yes' to.

*Here's the link to the Soul Care Self-Assessment: <http://lifejourney.church/soulcare>.
Next week we'll take a little more time to share some of the high points of our Soul Care Plans.*