

When Up Is Down and Down Is Up

1. Warm up: Jeff began Sunday's sermon by noting that, in life, what we think is good for us sometimes isn't, and what we think is bad for us often turns out to be good. Jeff mentioned the example of oatmeal and pinto beans; both are considered healthy foods, but happen to spike Jeff's blood sugar. In your own life, what's something (large or small) that you thought would be good for you but turned out to be bad or vice versa.
2. In Lewis Carroll's book "Through the Looking Glass," Alice passes through the mirror above the fireplace in her home and enters an alternate reality where everything is upside down. Flowers can talk, time moves backwards, questions get answered before they're asked, and you get closer to objects by walking away from them. It's all very counterintuitive. Spiritually speaking, Jesus invites us to step through the looking glass into an upside-down reality where true happiness is not determined by our outer circumstances.
 - a. For example, Jesus said, "Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it." Luke 17:33. What do you think that meant?
 - b. Jeff contrasted the example of the richest person in the world, Elon Musk, with a rickshaw driver in India. You'd think Musk would be living the good life and fabulously happy. Instead, he's been through three divorces, has fathered 14 different children by four different women, works 120 hours per week, hasn't taken a vacation in 25 years, lives alone, says he feels lonely, confesses he's "often not happy," and takes lots of ketamine to get through his days and nights. Have you ever known someone who seemed to have so much, but actually had very little? Tell us about them. What should we learn from examples like this?
 - c. The rickshaw driver that Jeff mentioned, Manoj Singh, lives in a one-room corrugated metal lean-to with his wife and three children. His job pulling people around town is grueling and his family often has only salted rice to eat. Yet he declares, "I'm not poor! I'm the richest person!" How is that possible? And what should we learn from his example?
 - d. Suppose God said, "You can either be Elon Musk or Manoj Singh – you must choose to be one or the other, living as them without changes." So, you can either be the richest person in the world or a rickshaw driver living in abject poverty. Which would you choose and why?
3. Jesus said, "The gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Matthew 7:13. Note that in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wasn't talking here about the life to come, but about our earthly life and how we live it right now. So Jesus is challenging us to recognize that there are two basic paths we can choose for our life. Jeff sketched out his understanding of those two paths, in a graph shown on p. 3. Take a look, then we'll discuss.

- a. It's important to note that indulgence, as used in this context, is not necessarily a bad thing. It simply represents the things we can indulge in that bring us pleasure, many of which are legitimate pleasures. But the result, Jeff said, is like a temporary sugar high. It feels good, but doesn't last. You have to keep finding additional pleasurable experiences to get another hit of happy. Tell us about a pleasurable experience from your past that was truly wonderful, but not capable of producing lasting happiness.
 - b. Proverbs 27:20 says, "Hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of humanity are never satisfied." What do you think that means?
4. Jesus calls us to a different path that he elsewhere refers to as Abundant Life. This second path is based on sacrificial service and, therefore, is very counterintuitive since a life of sacrificial service is hard. But this is the path that Jesus calls us to time-and-time again, including at the Last Supper. Let's read John 13:1-17, as printed on the next page.
 - a. Why do you imagine none of the disciples wanted to be the foot washer?
 - b. Why do you think it was so important to Jesus to give his disciples this example of foot washing at the Last Supper – as the last lesson he would give them?
 - c. Jesus exhorts his disciples to repeat his example of sacrificial service in their interactions with the people around them, saying, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." The Greek word translated as "blessed" here is *makarios*, which describes a state of being supremely blessed or fortunate well-being. It signifies a deep, internal joy and contentment that is independent of circumstances. The term was often used back then to refer to the happiness of the gods. It's God's happiness in us. And here Jesus is teaching us that the key to realizing that kind of happiness, an internal joy that's independent of circumstances, is **living to serve**. Do you believe that? Why or why not? And how would you explain to someone else why this is the key to ultimate happiness?
 - d. One of life's great ironies, according to Jesus, is that we gain our life by sacrificing it in service to others. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus "endured the cross for the sake of the joy set before him." In other words, the Bible is clear that the path of service is often hard and requires a lot of endurance, but at the other end of that endurance is the joy of God that nothing can take away from us. Tell us about a time when you have endured a lot of hardship in order to sacrificially serve in some capacity. What happened? Looking back, how does that make you feel?
 - e. Building beautiful relationships in our life always requires a commitment to sacrificial service. If you believe that, tell us why. Why is sacrificial service so essential to our ability to build beautiful relationships?
 - f. Tell us about a beautiful relationship in your life that's built on sacrificial service.

The Two Paths (Matthew 7:13)

Instinctive Life

Indulgence —————> Pleasure —————> Temporary Sugar High

Abundant Life

Sacrificial Service —————> Significance —————> Meaning —————> Joy/*Makarios*

John 13:1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'
¹² After Jesus had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.