

“Our Spiritual Resume”

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^{4b} If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 3:4b-14)

I expect almost all of us in here have, at some point, had to write a resume. Seeking a job, applying to college, or angling for some opportunity, all of us have had to try to reduce the entirety of our lives and worth down into just a few words, accounting as best we can for our education, qualifications, accomplishments, and previous work experience. And there is no shortage on advice about the best ways to write one. Should it be one page or two? What is the best font to use? One of my favorites comes from the online job posting platform “Indeed” – they recommend that you use “power words.” Describe yourself, they say, with strong verbs that exude strength and confidence.¹ They even provide a list of 137 such words, including “accelerate,” “accomplish,” “advance,” “enforce,” “orchestrate,” and “inspire.”

I am inspired just talking about it, but don’t think Indeed can actually take credit for this idea, because the Apostle Paul was using it about 2,000 years ago. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul shares a very impressive spiritual resume that includes all kinds of power words. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, which was an elite pedigree in the nation of Israel. As a Pharisee, he read the scriptures, studied the scriptures, and lived by the scriptures, even those really obscure ones in Leviticus. And he felt like he had proven his commitment and zeal for the Lord in his relentless pursuit of Christian heretics. If anyone had reason to be proud of his or her resume, it was Paul.

But then he says something unexpected and radical. Having just laid out one of the best resumes around, he holds the paper aloft and rips it apart. Whatever I have just mentioned, he says, whatever I have accomplished, whatever gains or honors I had, I have come to regard them as “loss.” The Greek noun literally means “a bad deal.” But then he goes even further. “*I regard everything as loss,*” he says, compared to “*the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as*

¹ <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/what-makes-a-good-resume>



rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him..." The word we translate as "rubbish" is the Greek noun Σκύβαλον (*skubalon*), which literally means "waste thrown to dogs... filthy scraps of garbage... or even more pointedly, **dung**."² That's how little Paul thought of his worldly resume – an elite curriculum vitae that would have been envied by anyone and everyone in Israel.

Paul's point is that, in the church of Jesus Christ, we are called to look at things differently. We are called to prioritize different things, to resist the goals that the world pushes us to seek, and to live according to a different set of rules. His main priority was to draw as close as he could to Christ, to share the heart, mind, and love of Christ. At times, Paul says, the world might look at that decision and call it foolish, but those who adopt that kind of life find just the opposite. "To those of us who are being saved," Paul claims, this kind of living is strength, wisdom, and "the power of God."³

Last month we started our congregational book read of Dr. Lisa Miller's book, *The Spiritual Child*. Some of you came out, and we had some great conversation in both the evening and the daytime sessions, but I would like to see a lot more participation. You need to understand that this book is not just for parents of young children. Dr. Miller's studies and conclusions have sweeping societal implications, and a lot of that has to do with what we are prioritizing as a society and how we are teaching our children to live. In a nutshell, she is worried about how we are raising the next generation, and particularly how we are raising and conditioning young people to live for their worldly resumes.

This is how Dr. Miller puts it, in her own words: "I think that, in K-12, I was taught to have the wrong conversation. I was taught to go after what I want and get it and give it every bit of strength I could so that I could win the day. And that is a helpful skill, but it is completely insufficient to live a meaningful, full life. So we need to teach children, and really maybe as adults we need to help revisit this and teach ourselves to have a different conversation with life... to go from saying, "What do I want and how am I going to get it?" to the deeper more fundamental question of "What is life showing me now? What is life showing **us** now?"⁴

Dr. Miller observes that, as a society, almost everything we do has become "transactional." If I do A, I should get B. If I pay this much, I should receive this much in return. This is true even in the church. We live in a consumer-driven, on-demand culture, and if people do not get what they want, they leave. A lot of times they will say they are leaving because they don't "get anything out of it."⁵ But an important follow-up question is not being asked, if you are not getting anything out of it, what exactly are you putting into it? If you do not feel connected, what are you doing to feel more connected?

Dr. Miller wants us to recognize that, as time goes by, we seem to be concentrating more and more on **transactional** relationships. This means we are severely neglecting the types of relationships that are not transactional, but **transformational**... relationships that are not just about what I can get out of you so I can get what I want, but are about serving a

² <https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm>

³ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

⁴ Dr. Lisa Miller, "Neuroscience of Spirituality," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7utPlqnXV0>

⁵ Matt Swisher, "Transactional or Transformational: What Kind of Faith Do You Have?"

<https://medium.com/interfaith-now/transactional-or-transformational-what-kind-of-faith-do-you-have-fbb5cb28db43>

higher spiritual purpose... relationships that leave room for the presence of God to draw us together and ultimately make us happier, healthier, and more resilient.

Many of you will remember the Billy Crystal movie *City Slickers*. It tells the story of three middle-aged men whose lives are coming unraveled in a number of ways. The three of them decide to clear their heads with a trip out west to a ranch that specializes in giving city folks a realistic cattle-driving experience. Their trail boss on the ride is Curly, a tough and ornery cowboy played by Hollywood tough guy Jack Palance. At one point along the trail, Curly and Billy Crystal's character Mitch are riding along and talking together. As Mitch laments about his mid-life crisis, Curly cuts him off.

"You all come up here about the same time with the same problems," he says. "You spend about fifty weeks a year getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it."

That's when Curly stops his horse and looks Mitch squarely in the eye. "Do you know what the secret of life is?" he asks.

Mitch has no idea, so Curly answers his own question. He holds up one finger. "This," he says. "One thing -- just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don't mean squat."

"That's great," Mitch says. "But what's the 'one thing'?" Curly drops his finger and points it directly at Mitch. "That's what you have to figure out."⁶

The Apostle Paul had figured out what his one thing was. He didn't find it until middle age either. But when he met the risen Christ, all those things that had seemed to matter so much – his rank, his status, his educational achievements, his honored place in the community – all the sudden, they didn't mean squat. He regarded it all as loss, rubbish, a bad deal that he was no longer buying. And he would gladly give it all up for one thing: to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. I'm not there yet, he said, but that is what I want. That is my goal, that is the prize, and I will keep pressing toward it with everything I have, until God has shaped me into the person God created me to be.

Each of us have to decide what that thing is for us, but I hope that, here in the church, the living God is somehow part of it.

I hope that, here in the church, we can be cautious about letting our lives and our relationships get too transactional.

I hope that, here in the church, we will use this time, this place, these people, as an opportunity for Christ to show us a better way... a stronger way... and a more joyful way of being in this world.

In short, I hope that, here in the church, we can begin to write ourselves a new spiritual resume, not for our glory, but for His. **Amen.**

⁶ "City Slickers - One Thing," at https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=DOjV_YTSp0I, on Sept. 26, 2020.