



Ten Habits That Make Your Life Better

Habit Nine

My family wasn't big on hugging. In fact, I don't remember ever being hugged by either my dad or my mom when I was a kid. My dad never hugged me until I was well into my fifties. I am not great at hugging either and although I know it is of great value, I struggle to hug spontaneously. The hormone oxytocin is popularly known as the love hormone and it has been found to help lower your weight, lower blood pressure, fight diseases, reduce stress and bring a feeling of comfort. You know what helps the body release the hormone oxytocin? Hugs! A ten second hug helps the body fight infections, eases depression, and lessens tiredness. You want a better life? Give and receive more hugs. In the age of Covid anxiety, much of our hugging dissipated and there is reason to believe that has not been good for us. Some people try to make up for their loss of hugs by embracing pillows, or pets. Have you considered the possibility that you need to embrace salvation? Perhaps your wellbeing could improve greatly if you embraced salvation!

You may be wondering what value there is in embracing salvation. You need a hug from a real person, not some sort of theological gibberish. I would agree with you. We need more physical hugs from those who love us. But perhaps more than that, you need to embrace salvation. Notice what Isaiah the prophet, who certainly knew much about the highs and lows of life said of salvation. **Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.** (Isaiah 12: 2-3 NIV) Does that not sound a lot like what a hug does for you? Salvation raises your spirits. It gives you courage to face difficulties and trials. Salvation invigorates you. It provides you with purpose and meaning. Ecclesiastes says that there is ...**a time to embrace...** (Ecclesiastes 3: 5c NIV) That time is now!

Clearly Isaiah found that salvation did something for him, took him to levels of living that made him excited. Jesus told a story that points out what happens to you when you stop embracing salvation. We call it the parable of the prodigal son; the NIV gives the story the subheading, "The Parable of the Lost Son". It is Jesus' way of explaining what it is like to lose your way, in particular how it looks when you stop embracing salvation. The lost son represents you or I when we walk away from the life we have in God. The father represents God but also the salvation God gives you. The younger son became bored with the life he had in God's salvation and so he took what he had as the father's son and left for a far away country. When you have salvation, there are important changes that come your way, changes that make you a better person than you would be otherwise. Dare I say, changes that are better than wealth, changes that make you more likely to be successful than if God hadn't reworked you when you were born again. It is that wealth of character and personality that the younger son brought with him to the far away country.

Look what he did with all he got from the father. **"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.** (Luke 15: 13 NIV) When you stop embracing your salvation, a change comes to you and the qualities you had as a result of your salvation dissipate, like water evaporating from a lake in a drought. Troubles in life, difficulties in relationships, stress at work all drain off the joy and peace and hope you gained when you first came to Christ and God began to work in you His own personality and character traits. Because of a disinterest in God and a general disengagement from Him, your spiritual resources are drained and not replenished. Thus you face everything with just what you have inside you, not with what God can give you. The younger son found out how miserable you can be if you cut yourself off from Christ and His infilling power. **After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.**

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
(Luke 15: 14-16 NIV)

Some of the most dismal, damaged souls are those who stop embracing their salvation. For one reason or another they walked away from God and no longer look to Him for strength, peace, and hope. I know someone right now who stopped embracing his salvation, decided to do it on his own and has become miserable. Over the years I've watched many stop embracing their salvation and lose the peace and joy they once had when they walked with God. Consider the strange and informative case study of David. He was a great man of God, called by the prophet Samuel when he was young, a man after God's "**own heart**", full of vibrant faith and able to deal with tremendous adversity. He fought and overcame Goliath, battled the powerful Philistines successfully and even when he went through ten years of running from King Saul who wanted to kill him, David remained emotionally and psychologically strong, powerful in spirit. That all changed, however, when David stopped embracing his salvation.

Carefully notice the mandate the Lord gave of how a king was to be when he came to power. **The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself ... He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.** (Deuteronomy 17: 16a-17 NIV) Now it must be noted that David's son Solomon was far worse at violating this directive of God than was David, but David chose also to not live up to this. He had eight wives and who knows how many concubines, at least ten. He became fabulously wealthy. His sons all had their own houses and he lived in a great palace. By the time David committed adultery with Bathsheba because eighteen or more beautiful women weren't enough for him, he had already moved so far from God and the lifestyle the Lord wanted him to live that it wasn't a great leap for him to let lust ruin him more. When you fail to embrace salvation, you will find someone (something) else to hold and cherish. It is then that you begin to fall into the same trap the younger son did in Jesus' parable and that David, the great king did too.

Consider the anguish within the younger son over what he made of his life and the steps he was willing to go through to gain back even a portion of what he once had when he was aligned with his father. **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'**" (Luke 15: 17-19 NIV) David described his experience of failing to embrace his salvation this way. **I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.** (Psalm 38:8-10 NIV) Sin had caught up with David and he became a miserable soul as a result. The Psalmist described how miserable others were who stopped valuing their salvation. **Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. So he subjected them to bitter labor...** (Psalm 107: 10-12a NIV)

You may not find yourself as unsettled and disturbed as the younger son and David were when they failed to embrace their salvation, but you perhaps have felt a touch of the misery it brings. Unsettled in spirit, not having much faith, disinterested in being close to God, joyless and lacking peace, mild depression, worried and not having a sense of purpose, confused by your mood swings and frustrated by the way your life is going. When the younger brother got to that point, he went back home. When David did, he prayed this simple prayer. **Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** (Psalm 51: 12 NIV) David is not asking for salvation but rather to regain the joy of his salvation. Perhaps that is you. Your salvation is not in question. Maybe the goodness and joy of salvation is missing for you and like David, your prayer to God is, "I want the joy of salvation back!" Remember old Scrooge. He never lost Christmas. He lost the joy of Christmas, and it took a family who loved Christmas to remind him of what he was missing. Go to Christ right now and tell Him, "I want you. I really do want you!"