

TRANSFORMED



SPIRITUAL HEALTH

“How to Get Closer to God”

Luke 15:11-24
September 7, 2014

1.

“...he wasted it all...he had nothing left...he got desperate and hungry... he finally came to his senses...” Luke 15:13-14, 17

GOD: “You’ll find me when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else.”
Jeremiah 29:13 (Message)

2.

“When he came to his senses, he said...“I have sinned against God and you...” Luke 15:17-18

“Your sins have separated you from your God, and have hidden his face from you...” Isaiah 59:2

“Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean! I recognize my faults and I am Conscious that I’ve sinned against you.” Psalm 51:1-4 (TEV)

“The Lord says, ‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.’” Isaiah 1:18 (NLT)

The HABIT of a Regular Spiritual Check-up:

“Test yourself to make sure you’re solid in the faith. Don’t drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourself regular checkups. If you fail the test, do something about it.”

2 Corinthians 13:5 (Message)

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.” 1 Corinthians 11:28 (NIV)

3.

The son drifted away saying, “GIVE ME MY share...”
Luke 15:12

He returned to the Father saying, “MAKE ME a servant” Luke 15:19

“Because God is merciful to you, OFFER yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. And do not conform to the pattern of this world, but BE transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

THE FATHER’S RESPONSE

“Filled with love and compassion, he ran out to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him!...Bring the best...” Luke 15:20, 22

4.

“We’re going to celebrate with a feast of eating and drinking...He was lost but now he’s found! So the party begins!” Luke 15:23-24

“Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him... his name is the Lord!” Psalm 68:4 (ESV)

“I will sing to the Lord because he has been so good to me!” Psalm 13:6 (NLT)

“On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread and spoke a prayer of Thanksgiving. He broke the bread and said, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.’”

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

TRANSFORMED
Spiritual Health
“How to Get Closer to God”

Luke 15:11-24

September 7, 2014 AM Worship

This Message is directly From Rick Warren though I added in the actual preaching of the message my own illustrations and other extras.

. The further away you get from God, the more your life is troubled
The closer you get to God, the more your life is transformed

Welcome to Fifty Days of Transformation. Today we begin part one as we start looking at seven key areas of your life. Seven key areas you want to make changes in.

Our verse which is our theme for this next seven weeks is Romans 12:2. We mentioned it last week in the introduction. Let's read it together. Romans 12:2 *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* And where is that found? Romans 12:2.

You've heard me say this many times. The way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel determines the way you act. If you want to change something in your life that you don't like you don't start with your actions, you don't even start with your feelings. You start with your thoughts. If you're acting depressed it's because you feel depressed. And if you're feeling depressed it's because you're thinking depressed thoughts.

The key to transformation starts not in your actions, not in your behavior, not in your body. It doesn't start with your will. It starts with your thoughts. And if you can change the way you think that'll change the way you feel. And if you change the way you feel that will change the way you act.

We're going to take that principle, Romans 12:2 principle, and apply it to all seven key areas of your life – relational, physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, financial, vocational. We're going to look at all seven major areas of your life about how do I change the way I think about this so that I feel about it differently. Then if I feel differently it's going to change the way I act and the way I respond to other people. And that's called transformation.

Transformation changes us from emptiness to fullness. Transformation changes us from defeat and failure to faith and victory. Transformation changes us from insecurity and inferiority to courage and to boldness. It helps us to become all that God wants us to be.

What I want to say in this first session as we begin looking at your spiritual health – we're going to start with that – is that the further away you get from God the more trouble you're going to have in your life. The more trials, the more difficulties, the more stress, the more things are going to go wrong because you're not cooperating with your Creator. You're not following God's plan for your life. And the Bible says the way of the unrighteous is rough. It's full of thorns. It's difficult. It's a rocky, rocky road. The further I get away from God, the more trouble I'm going to have in my life.

On the other hand, the closer I get to God, the more my life is going to be transformed.

We can see this all through Scripture. Paul, when he finally met Jesus Christ face to face, he was radically transformed from literally a terrorist – he was a religious terrorist – into the apostle of love. He wrote the most beautiful poem on love ever written, ever penned by man.

Isaiah was transformed from a depressed person into a courageous person when he met God. When he got close to God.

Moses got so close to God, the Bible says, he was even transformed in his appearance. People had to even look away from him. He almost glowed.

He got so close to God that he got his light and in him is no darkness at all. He was literally physically transformed.

We all want to be close to God. You wouldn't be here this weekend if you didn't want to be close to God in some way. But the Bible says "*All we like sheep have gone astray. We each have turned into our own way.*" In other words, like sheep we tend to wander.

You don't have to teach sheep to drift off. They just do it naturally. By their very nature they just kind of wander off and the shepherd has to bring them back in. And they'll walk off a cliff. Sheep aren't really that bright an animal. They'll walk into a den of wolves. And in all kinds of difficult and dangerous situations. Sheep tend to wander. The Bible says "*All we [you and me] like sheep tend to go astray.*" We don't tend to stay close to God. We tend to wander off.

So this weekend as we start transformation if I said the closer you get to God the more you're going to be transformed, we need to talk about how do you get close to God, how do you stay close to God, and if you've fallen away from God, how do you get back in that close relationship to God.

Some of you can point to a time in your life where you'd say, I remember when I really felt God's presence. I was close to God. I could sense his friendship. I could sense the fellowship. There was a joy in my life. But I've lost that. It's like you let the air out of a balloon. How do I get back to God if I've kind of wandered away? Kind of lost the spark. Because if I'm not close to God I don't have the power to make all the other transformations.

Fortunately we have a story in the Bible on how to get back to God and how to get close to the Father. It's one of those famous stories in the entire Bible. Jesus told it. It's the story of the Prodigal Son or sometimes it's called the story of the loving father because it's really more about the father than it is about the son.

That story is in Luke 15. Let me read you the story and then we'll pull some principles out of it on how to transform your life spiritually. Luke 15, verses 11-24.

Don't you love that story! That's an incredible, incredible story. It tells the story of how every one of us tends to wander away from our Creator, wander away from the Father who made us, wander away from the God who loves us.

This kid starts off saying, God, Dad, Father; I want you to give me what's rightfully mine. It's all about me. Give me *my*. It's a very self-centered life. That's where we usually start in life. Give me *my*, God. Give me *my*. I want mine now. And by the way I'm in a hurry. I want it and I want it now and if I can't pay for it I'll put it on credit. So we're always in a hurry. Give me mine now.

So he takes off. He packs up and heads off for the Sunset Strip in Jerusalem. There he wastes his money and his time and his energy on wine, women and song – particularly women. And he really gets messed up and he hits the skids. He becomes homeless. Then on top of that the nation goes into a national recession because there's a famine in the land. Now nobody has anything to eat so nobody is going to give a panhandler, a street guy, anything to eat because they don't have anything to eat. He can't even find a job. Things go from bad to worse. Finally he finds a farm where he hires himself out to do the worst job on the farm – slopping pigs. For a Jew that's not a good thing. That's not kosher because you're not even supposed to touch a pig. You're not supposed to have anything to do with pork. He gets the worst job a Jewish kid could get – slopping pigs.

He gets so hungry and he gets so desperate he's going "Man! This stuff looks good!" You've got to be serious, seriously desperate if you think pig slop looks good. And it says nobody gave him anything.

Then it says he wises up and he came to his senses. "Shoot! The servants, the poorest paid guys in my dad's employment, eat better than this. What in the world am I doing?" He knows he doesn't deserve his father's love.

He's just wasted half of his dad's inheritance. All his dad earned his entire life, working to earn. He says, I know what I'm going to do. I'm not going to go home and ask the father to just accept me back in the family. I'm just going to go home and say, Hire me. I'd rather be a servant in your house than be here in a distant country starving to death.

And you know the rest of the story as we saw the father's response.

From this story we gain the four things you need to do to get back to God. I don't know where you are today. You may be way, way, way, way far away. Maybe you haven't been to church in years and years. Or maybe you're a little bit closer. Or maybe you're a little bit closer. Or maybe you've just been distant for a week. You've had one of those weeks where you thought, I really don't feel God's presence in my life. And yet we all long to be close to God. How do I get back to him? You do these four things.

This is the pathway back to spiritual transformation.

1. GET FED UP WITH MY LIFE

I get fed up with my life. I get fed up with my circumstance. I get fed up with the way I've been living. I just get sick and tired of being sick and tired. I am not going to live this way anymore. I am too stressed out. I'm too lonely. I'm too depressed. I am overworked and busy. And I don't even like myself. Why would anybody like me? I don't even like me. I don't like the life I'm living right now.

Nothing is going to happen in your life in the next seven weeks until first you get dissatisfied with the way you are. If you think, "It's fine. I'm just fine. I don't need any change in my life." Then you can sit out the next seven weeks because nothing's going to happen in your life until you decide "I don't like this. I'm tired of being stressed out all the time. I'm tired of being frustrated all the time. I'm tired of being overworked all the time. I'm tired of feeling distant from God."

You've got to get desperate. You've got to get hungry. You've got to get anxious for a change.

Nothing happens until you get fed up.

In that passage of Scripture it says this "He wasted it all... He had nothing left... He got desperate and hungry... And he finally came to his senses." That's where transformation starts.

Are you there yet? If not that's okay. God will just let you stay there. And he'll allow a little rain in your life. And if that doesn't work he'll allow a little bit more in your life. If that doesn't work he'll send a storm.

Why? Because God loves you just the way you are but he loves you too much to let you stay that way. He will not let you waste your life.

When God wants to get our attention he comes and knocks on the door. If we ignore it he just knocks on the door again. Then if we ignore it he knocks on the door again. And if we ignore it, he blows the door down.

Some of you have had the door blown down in your life. You lost your job. Or you lost your marriage. Or you lost a friend. You lost something.

Why? Because God does everything he does in your life out of love. He does not want you to miss him and he does not want you to waste your life.

You know the old phrase, You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. But you can salt his oats and make him thirsty.

God often makes you thirsty by putting salt in your oats. When you start saying, I'm just so unsatisfied with my life. I just don't like the way I'm living. I don't like this! *Hello!* That's God knocking on your door.

The first step in transformation is for you to get disgusted, to get discontent, to get fed up with the way you're living.

Jeremiah 29:13 says this *GOD: "You'll find me when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else."*

God is not going to reveal himself if I just kind of want to do it on the casual, just kind of a part time hobby. I've got to get fed up with the way I'm living. "There's got to be more to life than this. There's got to be a better way to live than this. There's got to be a saner way to live than this." You get fed up.

2. OWN UP TO MY SIN

You own up. First I get fed up and second I own up. I own up to my own sin. That's the second thing that this young man did. First he got fed up. But then in verses 17-18 it says "*When he came to his senses* [circle that. He goes, this is nuts, this is nonsense. This is crazy. I can't maintain this lifestyle I've been living right now. It's just not sustainable. It's not fulfilling and it's not sustainable. When he came to his senses... That is you wake up. To live without God is insane. To live without God does not make sense. To live without God is not rational. To live without the Creator who made you is not logical. It doesn't make sense. When he came to his senses he said...] *I have sinned against God and you.*"

Nothing is going to happen until you come to stage two. Stage two is you've just got to own up. I need to face up to the fact that I have not been living God's way. I've been living my way. I've been doing it my way. I've been doing it the way I think is best. I've been doing it in a way that protects all my fears. I've been doing it in a way that tries to control everything around me even though I know I can't control it. I'm still trying to control it all. I'm getting tired of holding onto all of the controls. I'm about ready to resign as general manager of the universe. Because I've noticed it isn't cooperating with me.

So I own up. What do I own up to? I own up to my sin. "*When he came to his senses he said, 'I have sinned.'*"

Isaiah 59:2 *“Your sins have separated you from your God, and have hidden his face from you...”*

Have you ever prayed and you felt like God was a million miles away? Have you ever prayed and felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling? Have you ever prayed and felt like it's like there was this veil between me and God. I can't see God. I can't hear God. I can't feel God. I feel like I'm just talking to myself.

Where does that come from? Your sins have separated you from your God and he's hidden his face from you.

That's where it comes from. It comes from your sin.

God hasn't moved. God didn't move. God didn't go on vacation. God didn't move away to a foreign country. God has always been there and he's never *not* been there. He loves you unconditionally. But if you feel far from God *you're* the one who moved.

You moved away by giving your love to something else. When you give anything else your love there's a word for that in the Bible. It's called an idol.

We think idols are these little stone things that people bow down to and worship. No, no! An idol can look like your car. An idol can look like your job. An idol can be a dress. An idol can be the way you look. Anything that you love more than God becomes an idol. The first and second commandments *say “Thou shalt have no other gods before me... Thou shalt not make any false idols.”*

Money can be an idol. Success can be an idol. Golf can be an idol. These are not bad things. They're just not deserving of first place in your life.

So I own up to my sins. Your sins have separated you from your God. The fact is this: You're as close to God as you choose to be. You can't really blame anybody else. You can't blame your husband. You can't blame your wife. You can't blame your mom, your dad, your brother.

You can't blame the government. (That's one thing you can't blame the government for!) You can't blame other people. As I said last week you spell blame b-lame. It's being lame when you blame other people for your spiritual condition. If my husband were a more dedicated believer! Really? If my girlfriend was more on fire for Christ! Really?

You are as close to God as you choose to be. The fact is you haven't been desperate. You haven't been fed up enough to say, I am desperate to know God.

If I were to hold you under water, you would struggle. But when you really started running out of breath, you would really struggle. Because you would be desperate for air.

When you're that desperate you don't just get fed up, you own up. And you say, I've got to know God. You're as close to God as you choose to be.

When I own up and I say God, I've blown it. I've been going my way. I haven't been going your way. I've been going my way. I've been doing what I want to do.

When I do that what is God's response to my facing up to my sin? Does he go, "Yeah, let me tell you what else you're doing wrong." No. He doesn't rub it in.

When I come and say, "God, you know what I've done. I'm really sorry." What does he do? Here's the prayer you should pray. Psalm 51. David prayed this prayer after he committed adultery and killed Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. This is pretty serious sin. Psalm 51:1-4 David says this, "*Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean! I recognize my faults and I am conscious that I've sinned against you.*"

Circle the phrase “recognize my faults.” That means to own up. I face up to my sins. I own up to my sins. I recognize my faults. What is God’s response when I own up, when I face up? Look at the next verse: “*The Lord says, ‘No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.’*” Isn’t that a beautiful verse? He says no matter what you’ve done, no matter who you’ve done it with, I can remove it.

This is the Oxiclean verse of the Bible. He says, I can take it out. You know that stain? I’m never going to forget that one. It was so bad. It’s going to haunt me the rest of my life. God says, “I can remove that stain this is a stain.” This is the stain remover verse in the Bible

This next week you’re going to study seven habits for spiritual growth. But I want to give you two more today. You’re going to study seven habits for spiritual health and spiritual growth. But let me give you two more. The first one goes with this point.

The HABIT of a Regular Spiritual Checkup.

You want to develop the habit of a regular spiritual check up.

Doctors will tell you that every so often you need to go and get a checkup. But you need to have your heart checked every so often. But you need to have your colon checked every so often. [That’s a fun one! Anybody want to give a testimony about that right now? A personal story?] But you have to get regular checkups. Why? Because if something’s growing wrong in your body you want to know sooner not later, right?

The same is true with your life. If sin starts growing in you it can become a cancer. It’s better to nip it in the bud [Like Barney Fife would say] before it gets really big. You’ve got to do this spiritual checkup on a regular basis.

Where do you do it? You do it in your thought life. It’s a checkup from the neck up. You’ve got to think about your thoughts.

I have a spiritual check list that I use to evaluate myself. I've used it now for almost forty years. The Bible says that you can test yourself. Here are five areas that you can test yourself: worship and fellowship and discipleship, ministry and evangelism.

You know how we're talking about setting a spiritual goal each week? Here's your goal for this week. That you're going to do a check up today or this week and you're going to do it at least every six months. That would be a good goal. You could write down what do I need to do? How am I going to get a partner to help me with it? Then, what progress have I made on it? That's a good spiritual habit that you need to do. The habit of owning up. The habit of checking up. Just like you need a physical check up regularly, you need a spiritual check up regularly.

There's fifty daily devotions that take us through. You'll read one on Monday, another one on Tuesday, another one on Wednesday. And we'll go through the fifty days together.

Here's the memory verse for this week. 2 Corinthians 5:17. Let's read it aloud together. *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone. A new life has begun."*

That's a positional statement. What that means is God says you are a new person. What's that mean? It means you don't have to stay the same any more. You don't have to listen to those old impulses. You now have a new power in your life to make it through. You have a new power, the Holy Spirit in you. A new ability. You have a new community, the church. You have a new identity. And you have a new destiny. *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone, a new has come."* 2 Corinthians 5:17, that's the verse we're going to work on this week.

This habit of a regular spiritual check up... here's a couple of verses. The Bible says this *"Test yourself to make sure you're solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourself regular checkups."*

If you fail the test, do something about it.” I love that in the Message paraphrase. That’s what we’re talking about here in owning up.

The Bible says that before you take the Lord’s Supper that you should do a spiritual checkup every time. That this is a time to pause and not just get fed up but to own up and says, Is there anything in my life? Psalm 139
“Search me O God and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”
That’d be a good verse to memorize. Psalm 139:23-24. It’s a searchlight verse.

God says in this verse 1 Corinthians 11 *“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”*

In other words we need to do this second thing. I get fed up and then I own up. I face up to what I need to do.

Here’s the third step to getting back to God, to getting back in his love and his grace. Not that he doesn’t love you. He always loves you no matter where you are. But feeling that love.

Here’s the third thing. I get fed up, I own up...

3. OFFER UP MYSELF

I offer up my life. I offer up myself. I offer up my total being.

This is the third thing that we find this young man did. He got fed up – he came to his senses. He owned up – he said I’ve sinned against God. Then he offered up.

Notice in Luke 15:12 *“The son drifted away saying, “GIVE ME MY share...”* Then Luke 15:19 he comes back, *“He returned to the Father saying, ‘MAKE ME a servant.’”*

Do you notice any change in attitude there? *Hello!* He leaves saying, Give me. Give me, give me, give me. He comes back saying, Make me! That is transformation. That is true transformation. When your heart moves from self-centeredness to God centeredness. That is transformation.

Are you there yet? Or are you still give me, give me, give me, what can God do for me. Give me my stuff now! To, Make me your servant. That is the transformation. He returns saying Make me. That is a heart transformation. That is the greatest transformation of all – from self-centeredness to God centeredness. Are you letting God to do that in you?

That transformation doesn't happen overnight. God is still working on me on this one. It's going to be your entire life he's going to work on you. It's never instant. But there is a decision that starts the process.

2 Corinthians 3:18 *“We reflect the Lord’s glory and are being transformed [that means a continual process – We are being transformed. Not just once but an ongoing basis. It’s a process] into his likeness. With ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord.”*

That word “transformed.” The Bible, the New Testament was written in Greek. But you know what the word there in Greek – *metamorphoo*. Does that sound like anything you know? Metamorphosis. What is metamorphosis? It's when a butterfly goes from a caterpillar to a pupa, a chrysalis and from a pupa or chrysalis into a butterfly. That's metamorphosis.

It doesn't happen overnight. In fact, there's that stage when it's sitting there in that chrysalis, it forms a little cocoon, it's pretty ugly. Have you ever seen one of those things? It doesn't look very beautiful to me.

But when it breaks out that butterfly is stunning!

I so badly want to be that. And I want you to be that. I want you to be transformed from the lowly caterpillar into the beautiful butterfly. That is

what transformation is all about. It is metamorphosis. When you're a caterpillar what can you do? Not much except munch on leaves. And you're stuck on the ground. I'm sure that caterpillars have looked in the air at butterflies and thought, You'd never get me up on one of those things!

God made you to be a butterfly. God made you to soar. God made you to be beautiful not ugly. Beautiful! But you've got to go through the transformation process. And the transformation process is, one, get fed up with the way you've been living. Then own up. Get honest to God. God, I admit it, I've been living for myself. I've been doing it my way. And do that check up. Then offer up myself.

Transformation is a process but the starting point is what the Prodigal Son says, Make me. That's offer up. Make me. Transform me. Change me. God, I don't want to live the rest of my life the way I am living right now. Change me.

Romans 12:1 is our theme verse. But let me read you the verse before it. *"Because God is merciful to you, offer yourselves."* That's it. I offer up myself. That's step one. I get fed up. I own up and now I offer up. *"Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship and don't be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

No transformation until you do the offer up.

The Father's Response

It's important to notice the father's response. Luke 15:20, 22 *"Filled with love and compassion, he ran out to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him!...Bring the best..."* [Bring the best robe. Bring the best ring. Bring the best shoes. Bring the fatted calf. All these things. The father's response. Notice he didn't wait for the son to come home. While he was still distant he ran out.

The moment you just say, “God, I’m tired of living the way I’ve been living. I’m tired.” He will do more than halfway. He will run out to meet you. God is not waiting for you to come knocking at the door. He’s waiting for this moment in your life. He runs out to you. He takes the initiative. He throws his arms around you. He kisses you. He says, “I know you blew it. Get the best robe. Get the best clothes in the house. Go get my signet ring [You know why he says that? You know what a signet ring is? In those days a signet ring was your credit card. You take the ring and you press it in wax and that was like the credit card. He says go get my unlimited America Express. And bring it to my son who just blew half of my income.

God doesn’t hold a grudge against all the dumb stuff you’ve done. He’s ready to lavishly pour this on. Bring out the best. Bring out the best shoes, all these things. God has a better plan for your life than you can imagine.

If you knew there was a better way to live than there is right now the way you’ve been living, wouldn’t you want to know about it? Yeah! That’s what transformation is all about.

You say, but I’m living the good life. And you are. You live in America. You live the good life. You’re looking good, you’re feeling good, you’ve got the goods.

There’s only one problem with the good life. It isn’t good enough. You were made for more than the good life. You were made for the better life. A life you cannot even imagine. Any more than that caterpillar can imagine what it’s like to be a butterfly. You can’t even imagine it. You cannot even imagine it! It is so much better. And there are people who live next to you and they’ve got the car and they’ve got the cash and they’ve got the clothes and they’re going, I’m living it! I’m living the good life. And they’re missing the better life.

How do I get back to God? I get fed up, I own up. And I offer up. Then there’s one more thing I do....

Once I come home and I'm enwrapped in God's love. He hugs me and he kisses me and he says bring out the best. All is forgiven. *All is forgiven!* Go get the credit card. Go get the robe. Go get the shoes. Let's have a barbeque. Get that fatted calf. We're going to have Lucille's barbeque tonight. And it's going to be great. It's going to be a finger lickin' good time.

In that celebration you now come home not to condemnation. You come back to God in celebration.

4. LIFT UP MY PRAISE

I just say thank you God. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your goodness. I lift up my praise.

Luke 15 here's what the father says "*We're going to celebrate with a feast of eating and drinking...He was lost but now he's found! So the party begins!*" Life becomes a party when life comes to transformation. The Bible says in Psalms 68:4 "*Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him... his name is the Lord!*"

For your own transformation you need to start singing at church. Some of you, you say, "I'm just coming to hear Rick. It's all nice but I couldn't carry tune in a baggie." Many of you are prison singers. You're always behind a few bars and you never have the right key. I've heard some of you! Some of you have a voice that could be cultivated. Plowed under.

But the Bible doesn't say be pretty in your singing. It says make a joyful *noise*. You can do that. Anybody can make a joyful noise. You don't have to be on key. You just have to make a joyful noise. For your own transformation you need to sing.

I had a psychologist friend that any time someone came to see him for depression his first question was, Did you sing all of the songs at church last week? If they said no he said, I want you to go and sing all of the

songs at church for the next three weeks and come back and see me.

I never really understood why he was doing that until this week. A global study came out done by Swedish researchers. They'd done a scientific study and concluded that the habit of group singing – not singing by yourself, the habit of group singing is good for your health.

It is great therapy to sing with other people. It's good for your mental health. It's good for emotional health. It's good for your social health. And it's good for your physical health. All the different areas. They did an extensive study and they discovered that singing with other people lowers your blood pressure, releases endorphins, which makes you feel good, improves your mood, builds you confidence, relieves the loneliness, releases negative emotions and stress, and creates positive emotions.

Another study showed that people who sing in worship each week live longer. I want you to live longer.

It referred to this book so I went and bought this book this week. It's called Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness in Singing with Others. A fascinating study that these guys had done on this.

So we're going to do something good for your health right now. You're going to live a little bit longer. We're going to sing. I told you I was going to give you two new habits. One of them is the habit of a regular check up. And here's the other habit. I want you to intentionally start singing all the songs, even the ones you don't know, even the ones you don't like, even the ones you think are too loud, even the ones that aren't your style. I want you to sing them because it will lower your blood pressure, release endorphins, improve mood, build confidence, relieve loneliness, relieve negative emotions and stress. That's called transformation.

The father celebrated. He had a celebration. Not a condemnation – a celebration. When the son came back home. I'm fed up, I'm owning up and I'm going to offer up and now I lift up my praise. And we're going to party and we're going to party and we're going to celebrate and we're going to sing.