* **Apostles Creed**
* **Series Slide (Soul Handles)**
* Today I want to give you a picture of 2 different lives. Two people, in their own words, summarizing their own lives.
* One defined by success. One defined by failure.
* **Successful Man.**
* **When I was young, I had finished college and started life. I was married; I had children. I got a job as a financial analyst from an investment firm in Manhattan. I monitored the [entire financial world]. My cell was on vibrate twenty-four hours a day.**

**We would sometimes sleep on cots in our offices to be able to pull the trigger on deals in a heartbeat. I got more money for Christmas bonuses than my dad ever dreamed of making in a lifetime.**

* **My family lived in an apartment not far from Central Park. The kids went to a private school we could barely afford. We bought a place in the suburbs that we could escape to on weekends. I would wake up at 5:00 a.m. and start a coffee IV and live on adrenaline all day.**
* **I had only one secret. I heard voices. One voice actually. It came at random. I could never make out what it was saying. Whenever it spoke,**
* **something else was going on, or someone else was making noise, or I was on my way somewhere.**
* **It bothered me, but I could not figure it out. When I would**
* **be still to try to catch it, I heard nothing.**
* **One day, when I got home from work, I heard it clearly. I am your soul. And I am dying. I did not hear it again for many years.**
* **Not-So-Successful Woman.**
* **My mother and my father achieved so much that I could**
* **never compete. I was never the pretty one, or the smart one, or**
* **the talented one; I just filled out the family roster. Now I am**
* **married, but my marriage brings me little pleasure. My husband**
* **is as committed to his career as he is passive at home. I want to**
* **scream at him sometimes because anything would be better**
* **than his shallowness and silence. I tried teaching, but don’t do**
* **it well. I have tried writing, but every rejection from every**
* **publisher is so painful that I can’t bring myself to risk it again.**
* **I work at a job I do not like that does not challenge me, and**
* **I feel buried. My two daughters struggle with not being liked**
* **by boys and not having the right appearance. When I see**
* **other parents at school or at church with children who look**
* **successful and happy, for whom life and school and athletics**
* **come easily, I find myself feeling furious with them and with**
* **God and myself. I am not an alcoholic, but I look forward to**
* **three glasses of wine at night so I can finally feel relief from**
* **this knot in my gut. I do not expect that my life will ever be any**
* **different.**
* While the testimonies of those two individuals seem like people going in opposite directions, they both end up in the same place.
* Nowhere.
* Lost.
* Whether a perceived success or a perceived failure…They both lost their soul.
* **Title Slide- “Leopard Integration: Why Your Soul Won’t Come Together Until You Die…Every Day”- Luke 9:18-25**
* Here’s what I mean by that.
* The soul, (as that word is used in the Bible), is the integrated self...your mind, your body, your spirit…altogether as one, connected with God.
* To summarize it even further, a soul is either DISENTEGRATING…coming apart…or INTEGRATING…becoming a cohesive whole…dependent on how it relates to its creator- God.
* Think about the way you would commonly describe the lives of the 2 people we just read about.
* We’d say “Your life is falling apart.” Or “Coming apart at the seams.”
* We’d tell them, “Pull it together.” Or “Get a grip on yourself”.
* When any part of you,-your mind, your body, your spirit- loses touch with its creator, you lose your soul. You begin to disintegrate.

Today, I want you to see how God addresses this disintegration of the soul. How God rescues dying souls from their failures…and their successes.

* **Luke 9:18-22**
* **18 While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them,“Who do the crowds say that I am? ”**
* **19 They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.”**
* **20 “But you,” he asked them,“who do you say that I am? ”**
* **Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”**
* **21 But he strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, “It is necessary that the Son of Man suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”**
* **Matt 16:22-23**
* **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you! ”**
* **23 Jesus turned and told Peter,“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”**
* **Luke 9:23-25**
* **23 Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. 25 For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself?**
* **Transition-** Jesus sums up the way to become a soul that is integrated…coming more tightly wound together and connected to God…with 2 words. Follow Me.
* In the passage we just read, he tells us what he means by that.
* **1) Disintegrating souls say “Yes” to self.**
* **Integrating souls say “Yes” to Jesus.**
* Think about the word “integrity”.
* If you say someone has “integrity”, you usually mean that what they do matches up with what they say. Or who they project themselves to be…is IN LINE with how they act.
* …and, we typically notice integrity when its HARD to let your actions match your words.
* We typically notice integrity when BEING a WHOLE person costs us something.
* Mom and Dad, when showing up for your kids dance recital, or play, or baseball game and it costs you the real estate deal…because you turn your phone off… Your integrity shows. Because you TELL your kids they are important…and then you SHOW them by sacrificing gains at work.
* Student, when sitting with someone unpopular in the dining hall or lunchroom costs you comfort…or social status…your integrity shows. You SAY its right for everyone to be loved…and then you SHOW that loving people starts with YOU.
* This is what Jesus calls “Denying yourself”.
* Now, lets talk about another word. INTEGRAL.
* When we say something is INTEGRAL…we mean its ESSENTIAL. Its at the center. Its core.
* That is God. God is INTEGRAL to your soul. If your mind, body, and spirit are united in ANY CAUSE…are headed together in ANY DIRECTION that doesn’t have GOD at the center…you’re soul is disintegrating.
* You are divided.
* This is why the happiest, most content and satisfied people in the world…are not necessarily those who have outward success.
* Likewise, the saddest most defeated people are not necessarily the people who have experienced the most loss.
* Billionaires kill themselves, and people who live paycheck to paycheck are sometimes the most deeply satisfied people you’ll meet.
* Why? Because thev’ve paid attention to their souls. They’ve moved God to the center of their lives…instead of putting themselves at the center. And since he is the INTEGRAL part of them, they live with integrity.
* Wholeness…which always make the happiest people.
* **Luke 9:23**
* Here’s the thing about denying yourself. We live in an age where “self” has replaced “Soul”.
* Where the prescription for most of our mental, physical, and spiritual ailments is “self-care”. If you feel empty, fulfill yourself. Take care of yourself. Believe in yourself. Listen to yourself. Love yourself. Stand up for yourself. Be yourself.
* In other words, put your self…at the center. Make SELF the INTEGRAL part of you. And…therefore…integrity looks like doing what you FEEL like doing.
* Being an individual. Don’t SUPPRESS yourself…that will cause psychological harm. LET YOURSELF OUT.
* But Jesus says, “DENY YOURSELF”.
* And doesn’t that seem harmful? Doesn’t it seem backward? Shouldn’t we say “YES” to self…?
* **9:24**
* Not according to Jesus.

When Jesus talks about losing and saving your “life” here, that word “life” in the greek is “sukay”. Its where we get our English word “psyche”. It means soul. Or the truest most integral part of you.

So Jesus point is that there is a paradox to the soul. If you want be integrated, whole…you have to get YOUR SELF out of the center. You have to LOSE what you have built your life around…pursuing some vision of success that simply fulfills your personal desires…and you have to lose it for JESUS’ sake.

You have to move HIM to the center. Give him control. Build your life on his teaching. You have to say, “My inner desire to please myself will no longer be the decision maker for me. Instead, Jesus will be the decision maker for my soul.”

**Back to 1)**

Psalm 42 is a song where the writer says, My soul is thirsty for God. And he uses this phrase…that might be familiar to some of you.

He says, “Deep calls out to deep”.

This is EXACTLY what we heard in the 2 stories I shared with you at the first.

* It's the voice that the Successful man heard. That he dismissed.
* It's the knot in the gut that the Unsuccessful woman heard…that she tried to drown out with 3 glasses of wine every evening.
* You are created in the image of God. For God. To Know God.
* The only way you find integrity and wholeness…is if GOD is the INTEGRAL piece of who you are. If you lose your self, for JESUS’ sake.
* And as long as that’s not happening…your soul will not shut up. It will haunt you. Its deep. And even as you live a shallow life… …everytime that you try to fill that DEEP PIT in your center up with the SHALLOW pursuit of yourself…your soul will continue to say, “NOPE. Not enough. Money…still empty in here. Family…still empty. Sexual expression….I’m bored. OOOO career achievement….yawn…..GIVE ME SOMETHING DEEP. GIVE ME MY CREATOR. I WANT A REAL GOD!!!!!”
* Deep cries out to deep.
* I recently read a description of the soul that said “Your soul is like a reclusive mountain leopard. You can go years without really feeling the full force of its yearning. You are enjoying the pleasures of life, building your career. Its amazing how untroubled you can be, year after year, while your soul is out there somewhere far away. But eventually it hunts you down.
* You may forget about that leopard for long stretches. Busy with normal mundane activiites of life., and the leopard is up in the mountains. But from time to time, out of the corner of your eye, you glimpse the leopard, just off in the distance, trailing your through the tree trunks.
* There are spare moments when you vaguely or even urgently feel his presence. This can happen in one of those sleepless nights, when your thoughts come like a drawer full of knives. There’s trouble in your soul, and it keeps you awake.
* The leopard can visit during one of those fantastic moments with friends or family- when you look out at the laughing faces of your own children across a picnic table on some perfect summer day, and you are overwhelmed by gratititude. In those moments, you feel called to be worthy of such undeserved happiness, and the soul sort of swells with joy.
* And then there are moments, more toward the middle or end of your life, when the leopard comes down out of hills and just sits there in the middle of your doorframe. He stares at you, inescapably. He demands your justification. What good have you served? What sort of person have you become? There are no excuses at that moment. Everybody has to throw off the mask.”- David Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, pg 45 (edited)
* That is deep crying out to deep. Are you willing to DENY YOURSELF…and move Jesus to the Center of your soul?
* **TRANSITION:** If you don’t want to wait…for that threatening leopard to sit in your door way when you turn 40…or 50…or 60…or 90…after a life of success or failure…there is a way to engage him now. So that you aren’t afraid of that leopard eating you…rather…he can be a great comfort to you. You can have integrity now. You can know exactly what to say when deep cries out to deep. When the leopard says, “Justify your life.” See…
* **2) Disintegrating souls are okay with dying once in a while.**
* **Integrating souls die daily.**
  + One of the great tragedies of the evangelical church, is that in the name of JESUS, we have actually separated the mind, the body, and the spirit.
  + Which is not Jesus’ goal…at all.
  + His aim is our wholeness. Every part of us under his loving authority. His aim is all creation, the whole world…that has HIM at the center…being healed and working together in perfect harmony.
  + But for a lot of us that grew up in the evangelical church, we think about “accepting Jesus” as savior. In fact, that’s what we would tell that successful man and unsuccessful woman who’s souls had tracked them down.
  + So the idea is, just pray this prayer…sort of say this chant and then you are “SAVED”.
  + Which, to give credit, does have some truth to it.
  + But what tends to happen with a lot of folks, is that the God box is sort of checked off…and we never really replace what’s at the center of our lives.
  + We just pop a “Jesus is Lord” sticker on the back of our cars…or a City Church sticker…and then we still chase after the same SELF satisfying solutions. Our lives look no different than they used to…except we have more graphic T-shirts that say “IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL”. You know, we basically keep serving ourselves…we just don’t cuss anymore and root for Tim Tebow to finally make it in baseball…or whatever sport he’s playing now…and we sort of feel proud when we pass the Chip and Joanna Gaines section in target…cuz…you know…they’re on our team and they’re killing it. And MAN I wish I could be like them.
  + See, Disintegrating souls…are just fine with a one time…”yes Jesus, I’ll give my life to you.” They might even be ok with a “re-dedication” later in life, too.
  + But, don’t ask me to do anything crazy.
  + I want to take care of the afterlife…I want to get my soul squared away…and…I’d also like to keep me at the center.
  + **Luke 9:20**
  + This is Peter’s story.
  + You know, Jesus asks his disciples “Who do the crowds say I am?”
  + And then he says, “What about you? Differentiate yourselves from the crowds? Who do you say I am?
  + And Peter answers correctly “The anointed one. God’s messiah.”
  + And Peter is cool with that.
  + Until Jesus says, “Yes, you’re right. Now, time for me to go and die and resurrect.”
  + **Matt 16:22-23**
  + And now, Peter shines through. He says, “ABSOLUTELY NOT. I’ve put up with your meekness, your gentleness, in the past. Because at the end of the day, I thought you’d give me the life I wanted. One where I rule. One where the Romans can’t keep me down. One where me and my people are on top. So…I’m not gonna let anybody kill you. Jesus, I’m not going to let you mess up my plan for your life.
  + And Jesus says, “you are my adversary. You are satanic. Because you haven’t SET YOUR MIND on the things of God, but on the things of man.”
  + You haven’t lifted your eyes to the hills to see the leopard. You are caught up in self-pursuits. You are disintegrating…and you stand in the way of God’s integration.
  + And then, following this, is when Jesus gives the paradoxical statement…if anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself …and take up his cross daily…lose his life for my sake, if he wants to find his soul.
  + In other words…there is something about TAKING UP YOUR CROSS DAILY…and SETTING YOUR MIND ON THINGS OF GOD that intersect…and if we are going to FOLLOW JESUS…we need to understand what this means.
* **Back to 2)**
* **2 Cor 4:16-18**
* **16 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**
* **Colossians 3:1-10**
* **So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.**
* **2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**
* **5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God’s wrath is coming upon the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator**.
* **Col 3:12-17**
* **12 Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. 14 Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**
* **Luke 9:23**
  + Take up dying- Daily.
  + Discipline. Everyday making choices that set your mind on things in their wholeness. God’s kingdom COME. Things as God would have them.
  + Constant Putting on. Putting off.
  + There is no autopilot Xianity. This is not a sleep walk. That’s why Paul writes to the church at Ephesus- WAKE UP YOU SLEEPERS! This is an active faith. DAILY there is putting on and putting off.
* **2 Cor 4:10-12**
* **We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’s sake, so that Jesus’s life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life in you.**

Small ways of dying “not getting pepperoni on pizza”

* + Intro ideas (list) of some of the handles we’ll cover.
  + This is not about a to-do list or some unachievable standard.
  + This is about putting handles on that leopard. Engaging him- on purpose- NOW- so that he doesn’t maul you in your doorway during a mid-life crisis.
  + Talk about the PRACTICING nature of rest of series. Together. We don’t want to leave anyone behind.
* **Transition-**
* **3) Following Jesus in his death, means following Jesus in his resurrection.** 
  + When Jesus said, “Take up your cross and follow me”, he wasn’t being sadistic. He didn’t simply want company in his misery on the cross.
  + No.
  + **Luke 9:24-25**
  + His whole aim is that you are saved. That your soul is integrated. That you are WITH HIM forever. That the deep part of you that cries out for something better than money, sex, family, achievement, or fame…is finally answered. Its finally filled.
  + Jesus deeply wants you to be happy. Fulfilled.
  + And that can never come by simply being a moral person.
  + By simply checking off all the boxes in the sermon on the mount.
  + No.
  + Turning over your life to Jesus isn’t just following a new set of rules.
  + While its true that Jesus is a teacher and a moral example…that we are to follow…
  + We also follow him in a different way.
  + The author of the book of Hebrews calls Jesus our FORERUNNER.
  + When our sin and idolatry that replaced God separated us from God and we could not approach….Jesus led the way. He entered into the Father’s presence with a complete LIFE. A whole, sinless life…and said…MY life I have given to them.
  + **Col 1:20**
  + Paul wrote in Colossians 1 that everything…the whole universe…down to your very soul…is HELD TOGETHER by Jesus Christ.
  + ..and that by his blood on the cross…he is reconciling you to God.
  + In other words…Jesus death did something all our little deaths…all of our obedience and morality could NEVER do.
  + He writes in that chapter that Jesus is the FIRESTBORN from the dead. And that
    - Follow me isn’t just….look how I got away to pray, look how I healed people and valued people. Yes to those. But FOLLOW ME into eternal life…wake up little girl. TALITHA CUM!
  + **Luke 9:22**
  + Jesus is combining 2 prophecies that don’t seem to go together.
  + Son of Man- Daniel 7.
  + Isaiah 53- suffering servant.
  + One sounds like defeat. One success.
  + It is in Jesus death…and apparent failure…the cross…that he actually becomes the king of the integrated universe…full of integrated souls…that his now fully integrated mind, spirit and body…his church.
* **LORDS SUPPER**