

## **SULTANS OF SWING (Inspired by the Dire Straits song)**

**Week #5 of a 6-Week "Songs of Life" Series**

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### **LYRICS to "Sultans of Swing"**

You get a shiver in the dark  
It's raining in the park, but meantime  
South of the river, you stop, and you hold everything  
A band is blowing Dixie, double-four time  
You feel alright when you hear the music ring

Well, now you step inside  
But you don't see too many faces  
Coming in out of the rain to hear the jazz go down  
Competition in other places  
Ah, but the horns, they're blowing that sound  
Way on down south  
Way on down south, London town

Check out guitar George  
He knows all the chords  
Mind, it's strictly rhythm  
He doesn't wanna make it cry or sing  
Yes and an old guitar is all he can afford  
When he gets up under the lights to play his thing  
And Harry doesn't mind if he doesn't make the scene  
He's got a daytime job, he's doing alright  
He can play the honky tonk like anything  
Saving it up for Friday night  
With the Sultans  
With the Sultans of Swing  
Yeah

And a crowd of young boys  
They're fooling around in the corner  
Drunk and dressed in their best brown baggies  
And their platform soles  
They don't give a damn  
About any trumpet-playing band  
It ain't what they call "Rock and Roll"  
And the Sultans  
Yeah, the Sultans, they play Creole  
Creole

And then the man, he steps right up to the microphone  
And says at last, just as the time bell rings  
"Goodnight, now it's time to go home"  
Then he makes it fast with one more thing  
"We are the Sultans—  
We are the Sultans of Swing"

## **MESSAGE:**

All right. So, this young minister was preparing to preach his first sermon. so he asked an experienced pastor for advice on how to begin his sermon.

*"Start with an illustration that will really grab their attention,"* the old preacher said. He said, *"For example, you could say, some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of a woman who was not my wife."* And he smiled at the young pastor's shock, and he said, *"That woman was my mother."*

And so, the next Sunday, the young pastor was nervously clinging to the pulpit and about to start his first sermon, and he started strong. He said, *"Some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of a woman who was not my wife."* And he was so pleased when he saw the positive reaction. Then he became panic-stricken, and he blurted out, *"But for the life of me, I can't remember who she was."*

This morning, I want to talk about the freedom, the joy and the power that comes with being true to yourself.

How many people have ever had a time in your life where you were not true to yourself? How many people ever had a time where you let how someone reacted -- or how you thought they would react -- affect your decision about not doing something you really wanted to do? And how many people have ever felt stuck -- not as free and as empowered in a particular situation that you were in? Anybody have that experience?

Today we are in Week #5 of our six-week "Songs of Life" series. I think we always have a lot of fun in this, because we love music. And we all have favorite songs. We all have songs that got us through a difficult time or songs that help us reflect and remember the good old days. I mean, we have all kinds of great songs that we love. And that's what makes this extra fun.

Week #1: we did "Help" by the Beatles. Week #2: "Redemption Song" by Bob Marley. Week #3: Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven." Last week: we looked at Bob Seger's "Against the Wind."

Today I picked a fun, feel-good song, "Sultans of Swing," a 1977 hit written by Mark Knopfler. And Knopfler and his brother and two other members had just started their group, Dire Straits. And so, this was on a rainy night that he took some shelter in this bar -- this pub that was nearly empty. And in the corner was this old Dixieland jazz band that was playing with total dedication to only a handful of drunk people who were not even paying attention to them. They played with all their hearts. They were playing mediocre music. They were dressed in completely out-of-date suits. And at the end of their performance, the singers said, *"Good night. It's time to go home. We are the sultans. We are the sultans of swing."*

And Knopfler was quite amused at how such an average band could have such a grandiose choice in what the name of their band was. And he was so inspired, he went home and he started writing this song in honor of those passionate musicians that were playing for the love of music, even though nobody was really listening. He was so impressed with their spirit, with their attitude and their outlook, so much more than their music.

And I love how this band, the Sultans of Swing, inspired a song called "The Sultans of Swing" that really kicked off and launched the career of Dire Straits. You know, the song was recorded on a little demo thing on a shoestring budget. And it was passed around, and only because a couple of DJs in town started playing it regularly were they actually able to make the final one, which was their first single on their self-debuted album. And it had worldwide success, and it really launched their career.

I love how they called themselves sultans, which is an Arabic word for ruler: power, authority, all these. It was an emperor. I mean, it was a pretty powerful name that did not seem to fit them. And I loved how audacious and courageous they were in calling themselves the Sultans of Swing.

You know, usually getting a great title like that would be like: Elvis Presley is known as the king of rock and roll. Michael Jackson is the king of soul ... the king of pop. Pop, right? Okay, but James Brown is the grandfather of soul. And Little Richard is ... He's actually two: the architect of rock and roll and the king of soul. But these Sultans were not there, but I love the audacity. I love the confidence that they had in naming themselves the Sultans of Swing.

So today we're going to extract three spiritual principles -- three wonderful life principles -- that I think are a clear part of this wonderful song.

And the first one is about **THE POWER OF BELIEVING IN YOURSELF**. There are actual studies and research done that say that Believing in yourself is more an important determiner of your success and achievement than talent. Believing in yourself builds self-confidence. It builds resilience. And the one I did not know is: it builds better mental well-being. Because when you believe in yourself more, you actually have less stress, less anxiety, less worry and less fear.

And when you think about it, self-confidence is an inner conviction that you can handle, that you can achieve, that you can navigate through all of life's challenges. It is the foundation of our personal growth. It's the foundation of feeling good about ourselves and our self-worth. It is the catalyst and the willingness that we have that drives us to want to try; to want to change, to grow, to overcome. And overcoming with a knowing that we'll be all right and, ideally, we will be even better when we move through whatever situation.

The Sultans did not have talent. Their conditions were not ideal. It was a rainy night in an empty bar and no one paying attention. And yet, they played with confidence. And yet, they played with joy. They played with passion. I love that they ended it by saying proudly and confidently, *"Good night. It's time to go home. We are the Sultans of Swing."* To me, that just shows the power of self-confidence; the power of believing in yourself.

This little girl was sitting on Santa's lap in a mall, and she looked up at him and said, *"Do you believe in yourself?"* [Congregants laugh] And it's a good question for all of us: Do you believe in yourself? Let's go on a scale of 1 to 10 -- 10 being highest: How much do you believe in yourself?

We, when we don't believe in ourselves, we tend to not have the confidence. We tend to not be as daring. We tend to not go after our dreams. And we tend to not feel as happy and as good about ourselves. We tend to procrastinate. We tend to stay stuck and feel unmotivated and feeling like our lives are not progressing.

So how do we increase our belief in ourselves? I think the place to start is believing in the spiritual truths about ourselves. The Bible's got all kinds of spiritual truths about how we should believe in ourselves. Here are some: Philippians 4:13 – *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Colossians 1:27 – *"Christ in you, your hope of glory."* Luke 17:21 – *"The kingdom of God is within you."* 2 Timothy 1:17 – *"God has not given you a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline."* And finally, John 14:12 – *"He who believes in me shall do the works that I have done, and even greater things than these."*

And so, we have heard these words before. But the question is: Do you believe them? And are you willing to do the work to actually believe?

In Mark 9:24, it says, *"I believe, but please help my unbelief."* Anybody ever find -- when it comes to believing -- you believe, but you have a little bit of unbelief? Anybody? I mean, I think we all quite are not at 100% in our belief. But the truth is: it takes work. We have to work to truly believe the fullness of the truth about ourselves; about the fullness of the truth of spirit and consciousness.

And in meditation, there are a couple of steps. The first one is relaxation. The second one is concentration. And the third one is contemplation. And for building our belief in ourselves, we really need to spend time in contemplation. And the way we would do it is ... So let's pick one of those

Scriptures; Let's say, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* And just sit in the silence and let it just wash over us. And just be still with that contemplating, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Sitting and immersing her mind, sitting in the silence.

And then after about a minute, say again, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* And again, just sit there. Let it work on us. And another minute: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Everybody say that together: [with congregants] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Take a deep breath and let it just work on you.

Pretend a minute has gone by and let's say it again: [with congregants] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Take a deep breath. Sit into that. Relax into that. Let it absorb into you. Let it penetrate.

Pretend another minute's gone by. Let's say it again: [with congregants] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

See, believing in ourselves is an inside job. And we really need to take the time to contemplate on the power of these truths. There's a lot of truth that we know. There's a lot of truth that we've heard. But some of these truths we haven't allowed to fully penetrate and truly become a part of our consciousness and our mindset and our belief system as fully as they can be.

This is important work. There's incredible power in believing in yourself. And this is one important way. I would really encourage all of us -- for 10 minutes a day -- pick one of those. It can be, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* or any of the others. But sit in that space, in that silence. Let it just fill us. Let it just expand in our consciousness.

Another thing about believing in ourselves, I believe, is also learning how to love ourselves. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And the second is to love others as we love ourselves. It is a commandment to learn to love ourselves; to practice loving ourselves. It is a part of our spiritual work.

And again: How much do you love yourself? And with all of us, there's room for improvement. There's room for growth and capacity to increase the amount of love that we feel for ourselves.

I read an article and it was called "Loving Ourselves as Fiercely as We Love Our Children." How many people have ever had a harder time loving yourself than loving others? Anybody have that? Okay, four or five of us, good.

I was listening to this podcast, and the guy said this. He said, *"Why do you love your child? Is it because they're beautiful, or they're smart, or they eat their broccoli,? Or do you love them still when they mess up and make mistakes, or they're unkind?"* And the answer was, *"No, no, no. We love them because they're our child."* How many people would agree that's the best reason? You love your child because it's your child. How many would agree with that?

And so his next question was: *"Why do you love yourself? Or maybe, why don't you love yourself?"* He said the answer should be the exact same: that we should love ourselves because we're the self that God gave us. We are the soul that God gave us. We are the spirit and the being that God gave us to learn and enjoy and live and express the divine essence in ourselves.

So, the same thing we should do is take a simple mantra or thought like, *"God loves me"* or, *"I am loved"* and do that same contemplation meditation of just saying it; waiting a minute; letting it sink into us; saying it again: *"God loves me"* or, *"I am loved."* And just allowing it to work and deepen in us and literally become a part of our consciousness; a part of ourselves.

So, the first thing I think this teaches us is the importance and the power of believing in yourself.

The second one is to **BE TRUE TO OURSELVES.**

I love that these guys -- they were not playing for fame. They were not performing for validation. They were just expressing the music that was within them. They weren't looking for fulfillment. I mean, they were looking for fulfillment; they weren't looking for fans. They weren't looking for fame. They were just looking to express the music that was in them, and they were being true to themselves.

Let's look at a couple of the verses. It says:

**Check out Guitar George  
He knows all the chords.  
Mind, it's strictly rhythm  
He doesn't want to make it cry or sing**

And what he's saying is: he only wants to play rhythm. He doesn't want to do the wild solos -- all that glamorous stuff; all that harder stuff. He just wants to play rhythm. And that's him being true to himself.

One of the things with us, as human beings: we think being true to ourselves, that we should always be bigger, better, more famous, richer. I mean, we always think that more is better when it comes to being true to ourselves.

I mean, the second guy:

**Harry doesn't mind if he doesn't make the scene  
He's got a daytime job, he's doing all right  
He can play the honky-tonk like anything  
Saving it up for Friday night**

And so this guy, he's feeling like, *"I'm going great. I got a job."* So, he's enjoying the side gig of music, and it feels balanced to him. He knows he can play great, but he doesn't want to do it until the weekend. I mean, that's the way he is being true to himself.

We always think being true to yourself has always got to be bigger, famous, more money; more this, more that. Let me give you an example. Jane Leno loved cars. He still loves cars, though. I know he loves cars. He's got a car show thing. When he was a teenager, he worked as a mechanic in a mechanic shop. And a guy with 10 cars came that were classic cars. And all the mechanics were having lunch.

And the one guy said, *"Wouldn't you like to be the private mechanic for the guy that owns those 10 classic cars?"*

And Leno said, *"No, I'd like to be the rich guy that owns those 10 cars."*

And so my question is: Which one was right? Who was being more true to themselves? They both were! It isn't better what Leno decided. That's what Leno was called to. That was true for him. That was what his soul was calling. And the guy who wanted to be the mechanic -- that's what his soul was calling.

Everyone always thinks it needs to be bigger, higher, faster, more. And it's: No. It's what's right for your soul. It is what is feeling right for you: what you came here to do, what you came here to express, what you came here to make a difference as.

Anybody see the Michael Jackson movie? I just saw it on Friday night. I thought it was pretty cool. One thing I did not know is that Michael Jackson was into affirmations, but they subtly put it throughout the movie two or three times. So, the first time he was recording, his affirmation was, *"I am confident. I am beautiful. I am the greatest singer in the world."*

And then he ... you know, his dad was a little controlling and abusive. And on his mirror, you know, people put post-it notes on the mirror. His said, *"Find your voice."* And they would go to the mirror once in a while and you'd see more and more post-it notes. He could barely see his face because there were so many post-it notes! In the last one, he had one where he showed he was writing in a book. And it was,

*"I am here to be creative."* And then his new agent -- he said very, very clearly. He said, *"I want to create the greatest selling album in history."* He said that in 1982, and it happened in 1982. Forty-four years ago, he is still -- "Thriller" -- is still the greatest selling album in history by about 30 million albums.

And one of the things I'm trying to say here is: to be true to yourself comes in different shapes and sizes and forms. One is not better, or one is not wrong. It is: What feels right in your soul? What are you really called here to do? What do you call here to express?

Whether it was Jay Leno or Michael Jackson or another mechanic or the Sultan of Swing guys, they're just showing different ways to be true to yourself. And the litmus test to me is always: What joy does it bring to you? How do you light up when you are expressing the thing that you are here to express?

Now, the thing is: when you get to the place where you're being true to yourself, you also have to be aware that it takes courage and strength to be true to yourself. It's not easy to be true to yourself, because everybody is not going to support you. Sometimes you'll get people saying things: *"Come on; be realistic. Come on; who are you kidding? This will never work. Act your age. Tone it down. That dream is impractical."*

Anybody remember the book, "Let Them"? The whole thing is based on other people who always want to tell you how to live your life. There are always judgments that are out there. You've got to be true to yourself. And in the Taylor Swift song, "Shake It Off." You've got to be true to yourself. There will always be people who will judge you. Always be people who will tell you what's wrong and why you shouldn't do what you're doing. And then we buy into it by seeking their approval; seeking their validation.

So, it takes strength. Being true to yourself is part of the equation. The other part is having the strength to keep enduring and living and being who you came here to be. The Sultans of Swing were living their life on their own terms.

Wayne Dyer said, *"Don't die with your music still in you."* And so, what is the music that is still in you that you have not sung? That you have not expressed? And where in your life are you still not being true to yourself that it's time for you to be true to yourself? And again, the key is: Is it in alignment with your soul? Does it feel like this is the right thing for me?

Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor, said this: *"The soul suffers when we abandon our inner music."* And when we don't follow the inner music, our soul suffers. And we need to ask ourselves, whatever we're doing: Is this in alignment with my soul? Is this what I came here to do?

In the book of Mark, Chapter 8, Verse 36, it says, *"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul?"* What that's saying is: what does it profit if you do something and be successful at it, but it's not feeding your soul? It is not the thing that you are here to do. That it might look good on the outside, but it would feel empty and unfulfilling on the inside.

Believe in yourself. Be true to yourself.

And the last one is to **ENJOY YOURSELF IN THE MOMENT**.

The Sultans of Swing were really living in the moment, because they had an empty pub on a rainy night with nobody listening. And yet, they were in the present moment and enjoyed the experience marvelously. They had a great night. And even though the conditions weren't there, why? They were living in the moment. They weren't counting, *"Oh, my God, nobody's in here! Nobody's listening!"* They didn't let any of the conditions that weren't ideal stop them from being fully present, fully engaged, and expressing the music that they came here to express.

Mother Teresa -- this is attributed to her, and this, to me, is about being true to yourself:

*"People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.*

*Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.*

*Be kind anyway.  
If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies.  
Succeed anyway.  
If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you.  
Be honest and sincere anyway.  
If you spend years creating others could destroy overnight, create anyway.  
If you find sincerity and happiness, some may be jealous.  
Be happy anyway.  
The good you do today will often be forgotten.  
Do good anyway.  
Give the best you have, and it'll never be enough.  
Give the best you have anyway.  
In the final analysis, it is between you and God.  
It was never between you and them anyway."*

This song takes place in an ordinary pub -- nothing glamorous. And yet, magic happened! Because Spirit is found in presence, not in prestige. You know, the ego says "More," but the soul says, "This moment is enough."

And so, another practice for us is to practice sacred noticing. You know, like notice the sound of laughter today. Notice sunlight through a window. Notice a kind word. Notice your morning coffee tomorrow. Notice music. Notice silence.

We aren't here just to survive. We are here to play the incredible music that God has already placed within us. And it's not saying things like, "Oh, we'll do it when that happens." "We'll do it when we make enough money." "We'll do it when the fall comes." It is living every moment because it's available every moment. That magic is there at every moment of our lives if we are present to it to enjoy and experience it.

A very spiritual, devout, holy priest dies and immediately is sent up to heaven. St. Peter greets him there and says, "Hello, Father; we've been waiting for you for a long time. Welcome to heaven. You have done so many great things, saved so many souls. We're going to give you a special reward. You could have anything you would like to have before going into heaven. What can I grant you?"

And the priest said, "Hey, well; you know, I've always been an admirer of the Virgin Mother, so I would love to have a talk with her."

And St. Peter nods his head and shazam! The virgin mother is right there.

And the priest says, "Mother, you know, I've always been an admirer of yours. I've studied everything that I could about you and followed your ways in the best ways. I've studied every single painting and portrait that is made of you. And I've noticed that in the portraits is always a sight, a look of sadness that is on your face. I've always noticed and wondered, what made you sad? Would you please tell me?"

"Honestly?" she asked, looking a little pain and a little grimace on her face. "Well, if I'm being honest, I was really hoping for a girl." [Congregants laugh] That is a long way to go for not much of a laugh! [Laughs]

So sometimes life -- can feel like we are trapped; like we are stuck, that we are limited. But we have the power to switch that so it feels free, fun and fulfilling. And the way to do that is by believing in ourselves; being true to ourselves; and enjoying ourselves in the moment.

And that is the lesson and the message in "The Sultans of Swing." God bless you all!