

May 3, 2009 (Fourth Sunday of Easter)

“Is It Well With Your Soul?”

Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3

(Based on a sermon by Dr. Stan Reeder)

We humans are a spiritually hungry being. Last week we talked about having filled lives. God has created us with a vacuum that longs for His presence. We are created, heart, soul, mind, and body. Jesus used this 4 part understanding of our being when he was asked which commandment is the most important: (Mark 12:30NLT)

“And (Jesus said) you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.”

We have a pretty good handle on the heart – it is the seat of our emotions and feelings. We certainly understand the mind as the place of thought. We have no problem identifying our strength as our physical well-being. But the soul, that’s another matter.

The soul is difficult to get a handle on because of **The truth about souls: souls are DEEP.**

1. because Souls are BELOW the level of our conscious awareness.
2. because Souls are FOUNDATIONAL to who we are. In the end, everything about your life is tied to the health of your soul.

In *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard explains, “‘Fundamental aspects of life such as art, sleep, sex, ritual, family, parenting, community, health, and meaningful work are all in fact soul functions, and they fail and fall apart to the degree that soul diminishes.’ Your soul’s health is the driving force behind everything that matters to you.”

Jesus asked an important question in Mark 8:36-37 (NLT):

And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

You see, you can have everything, and none of it will be satisfying to you if your soul is unhealthy. As goes the soul, so goes your life?

The signs of soul neglect -when your soul relationship to God is distant and cold is: Selfishness, indifference, anger, chronic fatigue, lack of confidence, isolation, sin, no compassion, no desire for God, You could have the whole world and if these things are what describe your life... what use is it all?

But when your soul is healthy through being deeply connected with God the results are: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, compassion, trust, discernment, energy, freedom, creativity, vision, balance, focus...

Let’s see a show of hands - Raise your hand if you would like to live the “soul neglect” list. No one in their right mind would choose to live with a neglected soul. “The truth is, you vote for one or the other of these two lists every minute of every day.”

Let's look at a passage of Scripture that will teach us how to have spiritual, soul-growth and soul- health.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3 (NIV)

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. **12** In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! **13** Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. **14** But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,^a and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.

THREE STEPS TO SOUL-GROWTH:

I. LEARN (Hebrews 5:11)

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.

Okay, this is describing an unhealthy soul as spiritually dull because you don't listen. There is something you need to hear and learn. There is a secret to soul-growth:

And the secret of soul-growth is this: It all comes from GOD!

Look at the man who is a follower of Jesus... he is on his way to heaven, his heart is right, but has not yet received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Listen to Peter...

Luke 22:33 (NLT) Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you."

Yet we know what happened, he denied knowing Jesus.

Listen to the way Paul describes himself in Romans 7: he is following Jesus, his heart is right.

Romans 7:18b-19 (NLT)

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

Listen, if you desire to do what is right; if you desire to have soul-growth, stop right now and thank God for the work that He has done in your heart. You are like Peter and Paul! But God had another blessing for Peter and Paul. A blessing that would not only give them the will to do right, but the power to do right.

Paul tells us about this work in Philippians 2:13 (NIV) and we need to learn it!

...it is God who works in you to WILL and to ACT according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:13 (NLT): For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Peter and Paul, and maybe you too, had the “will” to obey God but were lacking the *power* “to act” in obedience. The promise of Jesus to his followers is that...

Acts 1:8 (NLT)

... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

Listen and learn : God works in us not just “to will” but further “to act” according to his good purpose. We must listen and learn: that the power “to will” comes from God and the power “to act” comes from God. Many Christians never *learn* this. They believe that God gives the power *to will* – to want to obey Him, to desire to please God, want victory over sin, to desire a holy - Christ – like life – but **Many Christians mistakenly believe one of two things:**

- a) That they will NEVER RECEIVE the power to obey.
- b) That they need to TRY HARDER to obey.

The first valuable thing we must learn is that all soul-growth comes from God... *it is God who works in you to will AND to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).*

You read through Leviticus and see all the regulations/law that God wanted them to keep. If they kept it, they’d be holy. The problem was they tried and failed. They heard God say:

CONSECRATE yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and follow them.

-Leviticus 20:7-8a (NIV)

O.K., I’ll consecrate, I’ll keep, I’ll follow and then I’ll be holy... it didn’t work!

They missed a very important line - It’s the very next line but it appears seven more times in Leviticus... but they didn’t listen or *learn it!*...

Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord WHO MAKES YOU HOLY.

-Leviticus 20:8b

(Also Lev 21:8; 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32)

The prophets drilled it into the people but they still didn’t *learn it*:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees .

-Ezekiel 36:25-27

The thing we are to learn is there 5 times in those three verses

***I WILL** sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. **I WILL** cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **I WILL** give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; **I WILL** remove from you your heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh (tender and responsive heart - NLT) . And **I WILL** put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.*

-Ezekiel 36:25-27

The thing we have to *learn* is that holiness is something that is commanded, and it is something that is promised, and is something that God does... not me... not you!

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and **HE WILL DO IT.***

-1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

If you want to obey, to be pure, to have victory... thank God. He has given you that desire and the will to obey. But don't stop looking to Him... He will empower you "to act according to his good purpose"! ***LISTEN and LEARN IT! All soul-growth comes from God!***

O.K. I've got it? God makes you holy, or you are set apart for God by God, I've got that, I've listened and learned it... now what?

II. LIVE-it (Hebrews 5:13-14)

*Anyone who **LIVES** on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by **CONSTANT USE** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul describes what the Spirit empowered life is like as he lists the fruit of the Spirit. Now he instructs those who have *learned it*, to *live it!*

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

-Galatians 5:24-25

Galatians 5:25 AMP

[If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit.]

We are not responsible to produce fruit, God does that. We cannot make fruit grow. We can however cultivate the soil, and make sure the tree is watered, and gets sun so has all it needs to grow and be healthy and produce fruit.

How-to cultivate soul-health or soul-growth:

1. SIMPLIFY.

Keep it simple. Understand that all these Soul-growth patterns are works of God. Understand that we need to keep our lives schedules simple to make room for these

cultivators. That means saying “no” to many things that would distract us from soul-growth activities.

2. SCRIPTURE (John 15:5)

You will not keep in step with the Spirit unless you keep in step with the Word. Jesus is the Word of God... we must keep our connection with Jesus the Word...

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do NOTHING.

-John 15:5(NIV)

What part of nothing do we not understand?

3. SOLITUDE in Prayer (Mark 1:35)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a SOLITARY place where he prayed.

-Mark 1:35(NIV)

4. SPIRITUAL Friendship (Luke 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:33)

We see Jesus institute this pattern of gathering around him friends that would help Him in His ministry. A Spiritual Friend is one who helps you remain open to God; one with whom you have spiritual conversations with about the things of God. (also let the authors of Christian books be your “friend”. Reading Christian books will help your soul-health.

If we will learn and live then...

III. LEAVE (Hebrews 6:1)

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity

It's time to leave behind the elementary things we already know and let us go on to maturity in Christ.

There may be some right now to whom the Holy Spirit is calling to the holy life, a deeper life. You understand that all progress of our soul-health is from God and you are prepared to ask Him to do His faithful work in you.

There may be some to whom the Lord is calling to do a simplify and make room in your schedule for Him, to have more time in the Word, to refresh your prayer time; to seek out a spiritual friend. These things also come from God's hand.

Do not seek to accomplish them yourself... you need a work of the Spirit and then only to keep in step as the Spirit leads and empowers.