

Message: Lost or Found?¹

What’s a lost soul? Is it someone who can’t find purpose and meaning in life? Maybe it’s someone God is mad at? When does a soul get lost? Are there lost people today? These are great questions. We’re going to reflect on them today. To start, Dallas Willard made an interesting claim. He said, “A ruined soul is a lost soul.”² Let’s unpack this a bit.

You may have been taught to think of a lost soul in some unhealthy ways. That’s the reason some people on street corners hold up signs saying something like “You’re going to hell.” That’s a mistake to me. I believe they’re confusing a destination with a condition. I agree with those who say, “God will let everybody into heaven that can possibly stand it.”³

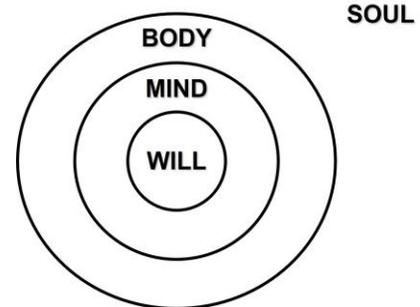
The condition of our soul is what really matters. If a car no longer works, it doesn’t matter whether it’s sitting in your driveway or in a junkyard. We aren’t lost because we’re headed to the wrong place. We’re headed to the wrong place because we’re lost.

What can we do to change the condition of our soul? The first thing we need to do is admit we have a problem. Our soul unites our will, mind and body. We talked about this last week.

Here’s a simple illustration to give you a visual image.

Our soul can be represented by three concentric circles, based on Luke 10:27, “...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself”:⁴

- **Will.** It’s what makes us a person and not a thing. God gave you the capacity to choose. Your will is central, but it’s limited.
- **Mind.** This is your thoughts and feelings, all the ways we’re conscious of things. Your minds crave peace.



¹ Some material drawn from John Ortberg, *Soulkeeping*, Zondervan, 2014

² *Ibid*, p. 62

³ *Ibid*, p. 22

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 41-43

- **Body.** Your bodies are like power packs. We wouldn't be us without them. They're filled with all kinds of appetites and habits.

Our soul is all of these entities. We aren't just our body or mind or will. We're the sum. That's our soul. Our soul keeps everything going.

A centered soul is ordered and works in harmony. Our will, mind and body are working together. We're connected to God and to others. Life is good. We feel energetic and passionate about life. It's the life Jesus talked about when he said, “*The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that [you] could have life - indeed, so [you] could live life to the fullest. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*” (John 10:10-11).

What's odd is we don't really notice our soul - until it messes up.

Sin does that. It's how our soul is ruined. I know that's language we don't like today. We prefer the word “mistake.” You know: sorry, my bad, my mistake. The problem is this: there's no such thing as an intentional mistake!

So the first step to having a healthy soul is honesty. We need to have the integrity to admit our reality: we sin. We all have times when either lust, anger or our sense of superiority overrides our will and mind. We know better, but our will and mind, made to rule our body, becomes captive to what the body wants. For example, when we flatter someone, we're using our face, language and gestures to conceal our true thoughts or intentions. The same is true for lying or other forms of manipulation. This takes energy. We're disconnecting our body from our mind.

In the extreme case, when we hate, we can't even admit it to ourselves. So we distort our perception of reality to rationalize our hatred. We disconnect our thoughts from reality, from the other person and from God. That's why anger should be viewed as a “red flag.” It's a sign we may be allowing our self-centeredness to distort the reality of a situation.

Sin is a powerfully corrosive factor in our lives. Unchecked, sin can make long-term friendships or gratitude impossible. It will destroy our capacity for enjoyment and meaning in life. Sin distorts our perceptions,

alienates people, harms our relationships, inflames unhealthy desires and even captures our will.

That’s what it means to lose your soul. It’s not a threat from God. It’s a clinical diagnosis. It’s not “I could end up *there*.” It’s “I could become *that*.”⁵ We could become unhealthy, disconnected from God and others. When we turn inward and can only blame others for our condition, that’s a victim mind set. Our soul becomes a ruined mess. There’s little anyone can say or do to break through. We find little joy or meaning in anything. Life becomes one, long, painful struggle.

I have good news: there’s hope. God designed us to succeed! God put us together in such a way that our choices, our thoughts and desires, and our behavior would be in harmony. Our soul is designed to be powered by an unbroken connection with God’s own Spirit, in harmony with God and all of creation. Our will is made to align to God’s will. Our bodies and God’s hands and feet. Our mind can have an attitude of prayer, in union with God. That’s the order God created. That’s what a centered soul is made to be.

It’s why the psalmist wrote, “*Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me*” (Psalm 103:1). Our soul connects all our parts. Our soul cries out for connection with God. Our soul cries out for relationship with others. Our soul cries out for a place in the world and valuable labor. Our soul cries out for wholeness and health. Our soul cries out for peace and justice. Our soul cries out because it wants to be healthy, to be whole, to be connected.

Maybe you’re struggling today. You don’t feel a connection to God. Your relationships seem shallow and less meaningful. You feel like you’re divided - part of you wants to do good and part of you wants to embrace darkness (James 1:8). When we feel this way, we may say things like “I feel like my life is falling apart” or “I just can’t get myself together.” These are statements of those who are wounded, who are hurt. You need healing. Your soul is calling for help to heal the wound.

How can we do that? Here’s what I’ve learned. When our will, mind and body are freely and consistently aligned with God’s love, then our

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 62-63.

soul finds rest. That’s wholeness. When we try to live with half-hearted devotion, our souls are always under stress.

Jesus said, “*I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything.*” (John 15:5 CEB).

God knows you’re hurt and suffering. And God promises to help. Knowing our sinful nature, Jesus freely entered the world to experience life in its fullness as a human. Jesus knows our trials, temptations and challenges. Jesus knows about pain, suffering and death. Jesus knows what it’s like to live without a home or without knowing when our next meal would come. Jesus knows what it’s like to flee from the terror of rulers and people who would do us harm.

Jesus also knows the depth of God’s eternal love. Jesus knows the joy of family and friends. Jesus enjoyed sunrises and sunsets, good meals and parties. And so he made the ultimate sacrifice so all of us – you, me and everyone, could be pardoned and healed by grace.

Jesus is the Great Physician, the one diagnosing our souls. But he does more. Jesus offers to heal our soul. He said, “*Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners*” (Mark 2:17).

“The most important thing about you isn’t the things you achieve. It’s the person you become.”⁶ That’s what you take to eternity. If you want a healthy soul, embrace Jesus. If you don’t know Jesus’ love and saving grace, I invite you to join me in prayer:

Lord, We believe in you. Forgive us for our sins, which ruin our soul. Pardon and heal us by your grace. Thank you for giving us bodies, minds and the freedom to choose. Thank you for our soul, the deep, mysterious part of us always reaching out, seeking a connection with you. Help us to embrace your love and grace. Teach us to trust you and love so our soul may be healthy. Unite our will, mind and body in our love for you, for each other and for those we do not yet know. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 54

Deuteronomy 4:29-31 (The Message)

... if you seek GOD, your God, you'll be able to find him if you're serious, looking for him with your whole heart and soul. When troubles come and all these awful things happen to you, in future days you will come back to GOD, your God, and listen obediently to what he says. GOD, your God, is above all a compassionate God. In the end he will not abandon you, he won't bring you to ruin, he won't forget the covenant with your ancestors which he swore to them.

Hebrews 4:8-13 (The Message)

And so this is still a live promise. It wasn't canceled at the time of Joshua; otherwise, God wouldn't keep renewing the appointment for "today." The promise of "arrival" and "rest" is still there for God's people. God himself is at rest. And at the end of the journey we'll surely rest with God.

So let's keep at it and eventually arrive at the place of rest, not drop out through some sort of disobedience.

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it - no matter what.