



Daily Devotionals: Soul | October 17, 2021

Day 1

Welcome to Week 2 of our All sermon series!

In the message this week we learned that we don't HAVE a soul – we ARE souls. Author and theologian Dallas Willard said it this way,

“You're a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God... What is running your life at any given moment is your soul. Not external circumstances, not your thoughts, not your intentions, not even your feelings, but your soul. The soul is that aspect of your whole being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything going on in the various dimensions of the self. The soul is the life center of human beings.”

Examining the health of our soul, and allowing God to restore, redeem, or transform our soul, might be the most important work we do in our walk with God. I love the way John Ortberg describes it, “God designed us so that our choices, our thoughts and desires, and our behavior would be in perfect harmony with each other and would be powered by an unbroken connection with God, in perfect harmony with him and with all of creation. That is a well-ordered soul.”

This begs the all-important question: **Is our soul in harmony with God's design for our lives?**

This week our daily devotions, while simple, could allow God to deeply heal, redeem, and transform our souls.

We're going to study a story Jesus tells about a farmer who sows some seed (the seed being the word of God). This text is often referred to as the “parable of the sower” or “the parable of the soil.” But truth be told, it should probably be called “the parable of the soul” as it describes different “soul conditions” that could keep God's word from guiding our day-to-day life.

In the days to come, we'll spend a few minutes reading specific verses of this parable and examining possible conditions of our souls. But today, let's simply read the text and spend time in prayer and reflection.

Read Mark 4:1-9, 14-20.



Once you finish reading, spend some time praying both now and throughout your day:

- This week, ask God to reveal areas in your life that are out of harmony with his plans for you revealed in his word.
- Ask God for courage, strength, wisdom, and for a willingness look at the deep places of your life.
- Thank God that he is loving, good, and gentle as he works in your life to look more like Jesus.



Day 2 – The Hardened Soul

Dirt is a natural medium for growth. When Jesus tells the parable of the four soils, He isn't speaking about farming. He's talking about the condition of our souls. The story Jesus tells is an invitation to listen with new ears and with curiosity to truly hear what He has to say. Jesus didn't come to entertain the crowds. He came to announce the good news of a new kingdom – the kind of kingdom that's available to anyone who's willing to truly listen and understand.

Read Mark 4:3-4, 15 and reflect on the following questions:

- What is your history with listening to or hearing from God?
- When have you heard Him best?
- What instructions in God's word are you resistant to?
- Where specifically is God asking you to apply his word to your life? Could it be a relationship, a step of faith, a sin pattern?
- What's keeping you from doing what God is leading you to do?

John Ortberg, in his book *Soul Keeping* wrote, "Underneath the Hardened Soul is often fear. The fear of being rejected, the fear of looking foolish, the fear of being hurt, or the fear of broken pride. But souls can be saved when the soil [the soul] gets soft [receptive]."

Spend time now and throughout the day in prayer asking God to soften your heart and help you take steps of faith as he leads.



Day 3 – The Shallow Soul

Read Mark 4:3, 5-6, 16-17.

In late winter of 2013, a man whose family had lived in the same home for generations suddenly died when a sinkhole opened beneath the foundation and swallowed the entire house. Experts say that acid rain is eating away at the limestone foundation in parts of Florida causing more and more sinkholes.

As Christians in America, we don't face persecution because of our faith like others around the world. But we do struggle with something called "Sinkhole Syndrome of the Soul", which can be triggered by things like failure at work, a harsh criticism, or a fracture in a key relationship. It seems when these types of troubles come our spiritual foundation can quickly give way and we can find ourselves in doubt.

The key word in Mark today is the word "JOY" (**verse 16**). Joy is a lovely thing, but even the bright rays of "joy" can be blocked by the briefest of rain clouds.

Maybe that's why David, after being confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, prayed this prayer to God in **Psalms 51:12**: "Restore to me the *joy* of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

Did you catch that? David knew that the joy of being saved PLUS a willing spirit to keep his eyes on God would sustain him in ANY trouble!

1. Describe how you felt when you first became a follower of Jesus. How did you feel about receiving God's love, forgiveness, grace, and hope?
2. What "troubles" have "blocked" the joy you felt when you first believed?
3. Are there any behaviors that are not aligned with God's plans found in His word? Hint: since none of us are perfect, the universal answer to this question is "yes". Considering this, read **Psalms 51:1-12** as your prayer to God.



Day 4 – The Cluttered Soul

Read Mark 4:3, 7, 18-19.

Someone wise once said “if Satan can’t make you sin, he will make you distracted, because either way your soul will shrivel.”

There are so many things that can and will divert our souls’ attention because we live in a “cluttered world.” If you’ve ever seen the TV show “Hoarders” it depicts homes that are literally filled with clutter, items people have collected and refused to get rid of. The interesting thing about clutter is that it doesn’t just suddenly appear, it slowly builds over time making it a very subtle and dangerous weapon of Satan.

“Clutter,” in the Christian’s life, can come in many forms. We can be weighed down by anxiety and our fear of not being in control. We can be distracted by trying to attain wealth, acceptance, validation, or material possessions. Or we can doubt that God’s plan for our lives is better than ours.

The first step to overcoming any issue in our lives is to admit we have a problem.

So... spend some time reflecting on the following:

- Where is the “clutter” in your soul? What are the things of the world that are distracting you from allowing God’s word to produce abundant fruit?
- What are the worries or anxieties you wrestle with on a regular basis?
- What “worldly desires” might be distracting you from following God?
- What doubts about God are you wrestling with that are cluttering your soul and keeping you from walking in faith?

Spend some time now and throughout the day praying that God might help you see any areas of clutter in your soul, for courage to be honest with yourself, and for the strength and peace to trust his plans for our lives are better than ours.



Day 5 – The Whole Soul

Read Mark 4:3, 8, 20.

Seed producing a hundred times what is sown is unheard of! This would have certainly gotten the attention of any farmer listening to Jesus. The point being that when someone hears the word of God AND accepts it... it will produce fruit.

Remember what we learned on day one: “God designed us so that our choices, our thoughts and desires, and our behavior would be in perfect harmony with each other and would be powered by an unbroken connection with God, in perfect harmony with him and with all of creation. That is a well-ordered soul.”

Is your soul “well-ordered”? Is your soul *whole*?

On this final day of our “soul” devotionals, spend some time in reflection. Celebrate areas where you’re seeing fruit in your life and if there are any places where you’re “out of harmony” with God and his plans for you.

1. Where do you see fruit in your life? We can often be our harshest critics, so maybe ask 2-3 people closest to you.
2. Where is your life “out of harmony” with God’s plans and purposes found in scripture? It’ll take some bravery, but you can ask those same 2-3 people to answer this for you.

Thank God for the ways you see him working. Ask God for forgiveness and the strength to repent from any areas of disobedience or lack of trust in your life.