

Small Group Session 3.1

Soul – victim of inner malfunction



“Downfall of a preacher man”, “Scandal in the church”, “Fall from grace” - these are all headlines from recent news reports about Christian leaders who have committed some (usually sexual) misdemeanour. They are depressingly common. So much so that there is even a Wikipedia page which gives a list of Christian evangelist scandals. Why is it that so many spiritual leaders, many of whom have had God anointed ministries, “fall from grace”?

Let God Speak First

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). A crucial aspect of discipleship is to regularly acknowledge our weaknesses, confess our sins to God, and ask for His help in turning away from them (“repenting”) in the future. A good way of doing this is to ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart, and then wait in silence and “listen”. You will often find yourself thinking about something you said or did which the Spirit wants you to confess.

Close your eyes and quietly invite the Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask Him to search your heart and then listen to what He says. Pay attention to whatever comes across your mind and ask yourself if this is something you need to confess to God. If so, confess it quietly and ask for His help in transforming this area of your life.

Soul and Character

In the group session last week we looked at the story of the Jesus’ disciple Peter who in one evening professed that he was willing to go to prison and even die for Jesus, but then only a few hours later he denied that he even knew Him. We also looked at Romans 7 in which Paul reported the conflict within himself, wanting to do good but ending up doing the evil that he does not want to do.

How does this state of affairs come about? Discuss.

To answer this question we need to take a closer look at the soul. In *Renovation*

of the heart Willard describes the soul as:

“... that dimension of the person which integrates all the other dimensions so that they form one life. The biblical view and understanding is that the soul is a term that refers to the whole person in its most profound aspect.

“Because the soul encompasses and integrates the whole person it is frequently taken to be the person. ... But of course the soul is not the person. It is, rather, the deepest part of the self in terms of overall operations; and, like the body, it has the capacity to operate without conscious supervision.

“The soul is rather like a computer that quietly runs a business or manufacturing operation and only comes to our attention when it malfunctions or requires some adaptation to new tasks. It can be significantly reprogrammed, and this too is a major part of what goes into the spiritual formation of the person”. (p42)

Do you agree with this understanding of the soul?

If the soul can “operate without conscious supervision”, what does this say about free will and accountability?

What role do you think the soul has in the “spiritual formation of the person”?

Over time the soul takes on the character of the choices made by the will/spirit/heart of the person. So that ultimately the whole person is poised, ready to



respond ‘automatically’ to the character the soul has taken on. Just like any other dimension of the self, the soul can be healthy or unhealthy.

How would you characterise a healthy soul?

What implications does this have for the hundreds of seemingly insignificant choices we make each day?

How do you think the soul can be reprogrammed?

Willard goes on to say:

“But for all the soul’s independence, the executive centre of the person—that is, the heart or will—can redirect and reform it with God’s help. It mainly does this by redirecting the body in spiritual disciplines ... The soul can be sustained intact and function as it is supposed to only in the keeping of God.”

Before you go ...

*As usual, read through *The Daily Disciple* together and pray for each other before you leave.*

The Daily Disciple

Solitude and Silence



In this week's triad session we described the soul as being healthy or unhealthy. In this week's daily disciple we begin to look at ways of turning an unhealthy soul into a healthy one.

Here we must learn to follow Jesus in His regular habits of life, particularly His habits of seeking solitude and silence.



In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster describes solitude as "... a state of mind and heart ... There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times. Crowds, or lack of them, have little to do with this inward attentiveness. ... In the mist of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence. Whether alone or among people, we always carry with us a portable sanctuary of the heart".

More guidance on this topic is offered by Dallas Willard in an article entitled "Personal Soul Care":

"Among the practices that can help us attend to soul care at a basic level are solitude and silence. We practice these by finding ways to be alone and away from talk and noise. We rest, we observe, we "smell the roses"—dare we say it?—we do nothing. This discipline can be used of God as a means of grace. In it we may even find another reminder of grace—that we are saved, justified by His redeeming power—not by our strivings and achievements.

"In drawing aside for lengthy periods of time, we seek to rid ourselves of the "corrosion" of soul that accrues from constant interaction with others

and the world around us. In this place of quiet communion, we discover again that we do have souls, that we indeed have inner beings to be nurtured. Then we begin to experience again the presence of God in the inner sanctuary, speaking to and interacting with us. We understand anew that God will not compete for our attention. We must arrange time for our communion with Him as we draw aside in solitude and silence.

"The psalmist said, "Cease striving and know that I am God" (Ps. 46: 10, NASB). And immediately following this, the writer affirms the success of God's mission on earth: "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (vv. 10-11, NASB).

"Other translations of this verse read, "Be still, and know" (NIV) or "Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me" (TM). God's provision for us and for His work through us is adequate. We do not have to "make it happen." We must stop shouldering the burdens of "outcomes." These are safely in His hands. Someone insightfully said, "The greatest threat to devotion to Christ is service for Christ."

"What a paradox! This is so easily a challenge for many ministers. Allowing service for Christ to steal our devotion to Him is a radical failure in personal soul care. But it is one from which the practice of communing with Christ in times of solitude and silence can deliver us.

"A response to giving attention to personal soul care often is, "I don't have time for extensive solitude and silence. I have too much to do." The truth is you don't have time not to practice solitude and silence. No time is more profitably spent than that used to heighten the quality of an intimate walk with God. If we think otherwise, we have been badly educated.

"So a couple of words of counsel are appropriate for our attending to the inner life. ... God never gives any-

one too much to do. We do that to ourselves or allow others to do it to us. We may be showing our lack of confidence in God's power and goodness, though it may be that our models and education have failed us. ... Knowing Christ through times away in solitude and silence will "let our joy be full" (see John 16:24). It will bring over us a pervasive sense of well-being, no matter what is happening around us. ... We can allow the peace of God to sink deeply into our lives and extend through our relationships to others (see Matt. 10:12-13).

There are many ways to develop this inner solitude and silence. Choose one or more of the following to try out over the next two weeks:

- Find half an hour this week where you can practice solitude and silence. This could be going for a walk in the countryside, or closing the door & switching off the TV in your living room. During this time have no prior agenda and do nothing other than be attentive to God.
- Do a menial task without drawing attention to your service.
- Resist having to have the last word in a discussion or argument.
- Do not answer back when someone curses or insults you.

Memory Verses

Week 1: Matthew 5:3

Week 2: Matthew 5:4

Week 1	Week 2
Matthew 10:21-42	Matthew 12:38-13:9
Matthew 11:1-19	Matthew 13:10-30
Matthew 11:20-12:8	Matthew 13:31-52
Matthew 12:9-21	Matthew 13:53-14:21
Matthew 12:22-37	Matthew 14:22-36