

Small Group Session 3.2

Right Ordering



Francesco De Vito is the actor who played Peter in the film *The Passion of the Christ*. After Jesus' arrest, Peter is watching at a distance as Jesus is being interrogated and severely beaten. When accused of being a follower of Jesus, Peter vehemently denies three times that he even knows Him. Then there is that heart stopping moment when Jesus looks directly into Peter's eyes. De Vito brilliantly portrays Peter's abject grief at having denied his Lord. In this session we get to the bottom of why Peter did the exact opposite of what he had vowed to do for Jesus just a few hours earlier.

Let God Speak First

Watch Peter's denial of Jesus in the *Passion of the Christ* (27min to 30min 20sec on the DVD. It is also available on YouTube). In a few moments of silence ask the Spirit to show you any times when you denied your Lord, or avoided an opportunity to speak to friends about Him for fear of being ridiculed or embarrassed. Ask for forgiveness and be open to receiving God's love for you which is not conditional on your loyalty to Him.

Report Back

Discuss how you got on with the solitude and silence exercise over the last couple of weeks. Did you experience joy, or peace or a pervasive sense of well being or was it the opposite? Don't forget to go through last week's memory verses together.

The Heart of the Problem is the Problem of the Heart

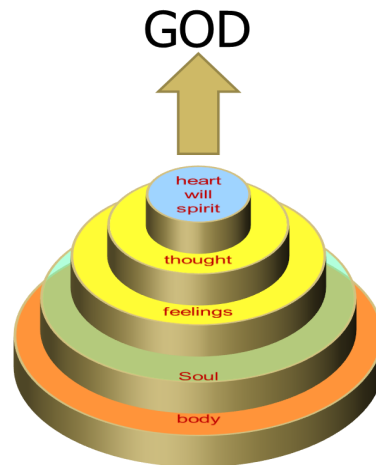
In the last small group session we looked at the soul, the deepest part of the human self which integrates all the other dimensions into one life. This week we begin to look at what it means for a soul to be 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' and how this relates to the other dimensions of the self.

Read Matthew 5:48. In what sense do you think Jesus is asking us to be perfect?

The Greek word which is often translated as 'perfect' in Matthew 5:48 is 'telios', which means 'complete' or

'mature'. Willard translates it as 'fully functional'. So Matthew 5:48 should be read as 'be fully functional as your Father in heaven is fully functional'

What do you think Willard means by 'fully functional'?



Willard relates 'fully functional' to a *right ordering* between the dimensions of the self. In *Renovation of the Heart* he argues that the right ordering of these dimensions is given as follows: "... the body serves the soul, the soul serves the mind (thought and feelings), the mind serves the spirit, and the spirit serves God. Life flows from God throughout the whole person, including the body and its social context." (p44)

How will the soul of a person develop when the dimensions of the self are ordered in this way?

"In the life away from God, the order of dominance is body, soul, mind, spirit and God".(p44)

How will the soul of a person who lives life away from God develop?

Remember that the soul integrates all the other dimensions of the self and embodies the 'automatic' responses of the person. If the soul in the life away from God dominates the mind and the spirit, this means that the person's automatic responses may not actually line up with what their spirit/will would like to do at a particular point in time, leading to inner conflict.

This is exactly the problem that Peter had. The choices he repeatedly made throughout the years of his life up to that point led to a situation where, in that threatening social context, Peter's body and soul dominated his response to the accusations of a servant girl. When Peter had promised to suffer imprisonment and death for Jesus just a few hours earlier, he really meant it. But now in the courtyard of the High Priest, the weight of his personality, which includes the automatic responses of his body and soul, took control and he blurted out his denial of Jesus before he'd even had time to think about it. This is what characterises an unhealthy soul.

What might be the indicators of an unhealthy soul?

How might a right ordering be established between the six dimensions of the self?

Before you go ...

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

The Daily Disciple

Solitude



In an interview with Christianity Magazine, Richard Foster was asked "What is the discipline that you think we need to be exploring more at this point?" His answer was:

"Solitude. It is the most foundational of the disciplines of abstinence, the 'via negativa'. The evangelical passion for engagement with the world is good. But as Thomas à Kempis says, the only person who's safe to travel is the person who's free to stay at home. And Pascal said that we would solve the world's problems if we just learned to sit in our room alone. Solitude is essential for right engagement.

"I so appreciated in Bonhoeffer's Life Together the chapter, "The Day Alone," and the next chapter, "The Day Together." You can't be with people in a right way without being alone. And of course, you can't be alone unless you've learned to be with people. Solitude teaches us to live in the presence of God so that we can be with people in a way that helps them and does not manipulate them.

"Another thing we learn in solitude is to love the ways of God; we learn the cosmic patience of God. There's the passage in Isaiah in which God says, "Your ways are not my ways," and then goes on to describe how God's ways are like the rain that comes down and waters the earth. Rain comes down and just disappears, and then up comes the life. It's that type of patience.

"In solitude, I learn to unhook myself from the compulsion to climb and push and shove. When I was pastoring that little church, I'd go off for some solitude and worry about what was happening to people and how they're doing and whether they would get along without me. And of course, the great fear is that they'll get along quite well without you! But you learn that's okay. And that God's in charge of that. You learn that he's got the whole world in his hands."

Henri Nouwen described solitude as "the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ("turn stones into loaves"), to be spectacular ("throw yourself down"), and to be powerful ("I will give you all these kingdoms"). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity ("You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone"). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsion of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.



"This might sound rather foreboding. It might evoke images of medieval ascetic pursuits from which Luther and Calvin happily saved us. But once we have given these fantasies their due and let them wander off, we will see that what we are dealing with here is that holy place where ministry and spirituality embrace each other. It is the place called solitude.

"In order to understand the meaning of solitude, we must first unmask the ways in which the idea of solitude has been distorted by our world. We say to each other that we need some solitude in our lives. What we really are thinking of, however, is a time and a place for ourselves in which we are not bothered by other people, can think our own thoughts, express our own complaints, and do our own thing, whatever it may be. For us, solitude most often means privacy. We have come to the dubious conviction that we all have a right to privacy. Solitude thus becomes like a spiritual property for which we can compete on the free market of spiritual goods. ... In short, we think of solitude as a place where we gather new strength to continue the on going competition in life.

"But that is not the solitude of St. John the Baptist, of St. Anthony or St. Benedict, ... For them solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs. ...

"In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing." (*The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*. p16-18).

Nouwen goes on to describe the struggle we go through in solitude as our minds are flooded with an array of distracting thoughts which "assail us". "Our primary task in solitude," he concludes "is not to pay attention to the many faces which assail us, but to keep the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine saviour. ... Only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature" (p21).

You have two tasks for the next two weeks:

- Spend an hour in complete solitude, as far as it is possible for you to do so.
- Start to make plans for a day or half day retreat at some point in the future.

Memory Verses

Week 1: Matthew 5:5

Week 2: Matthew 5:6

Week 1	Week 2
Matthew 15:1-20	Matthew 18:10-35
Matthew 15:21-39	Matthew 19:1-15
Matthew 16:1-20	Matthew 19:16-30
Matthew 16:21-17:13	Matthew 20:1-19
Matthew 17:14-18:9	Matthew 20:20-34