

“Soul Keeping”

Date: Sept. 13, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Theme: Care of our souls

Occasion: Series, Soul Keeping

Texts: Deuteronomy 4:9-14; Matthew 16: 24-27

Today we begin a sermon series about the care of our souls, based on the book by best-selling author, John Ortberg. We spend a lot of time and energy taking care of other things, but how well do we do in caring for our souls?

I've known fellas who detail their car or truck every week, and who notice and get upset when a tiny dent or scratch shows up in the paint on their vehicle. They care a lot about that set of wheels. They want to keep it nice and beautiful.

And then, there are people who spend hundreds of dollars on their lawn. They pay a lot of money to have it fertilized and treated with weed killers. They water it when its dry and they pay to have it cut and manicured. They keep a nice-looking lawn.

There are folks who work hard to keep their bodies in shape, looking attractive and beautiful. They diet compulsively and work out furiously to keep their bodies toned. They monitor their weight and are constantly looking in the mirror to see how they look. They want to keep their appearance beautiful so they can be admired and desired by others.

Then there are those who worry about what other people think of them. Perhaps it starts in Middle School when you want to be popular and fit in. These persons worry about what other people say about them, so they do their best to keep up with the people they're trying to impress, but may not even like.

We keep after our lawns, our houses, our finances and our appearance. But how much attention to do we spend on caring for our souls, the most important part of who we are? Dallas Willard served as a spiritual mentor for John Ortberg. Pastor John quotes Dallas a lot. Listen to what Dallas Willard says about the soul:

“Our soul is like an inner stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other element of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all that we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature. All else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, with reality, and with the rest of human nature and nature at large.” (*Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard*)

Most of us are so busy living our lives, rushing from one thing to the next that we rarely take time to even consider our soul. We're too busy with the nuts and bolts of making a living and keeping our household going that we forget to pay attention to the part of ourselves that was made by God for communion with God.

And if we do any amount of introspection, all too often we're focusing on our self. And the self is different from the soul. The self is a stand-alone, do-it-yourself unit. We might refer to the self as our ego. When we say that we're full of ourselves, or that person is full of himself, we mean the person is turned in on themselves.

But the soul is not the self. In this series we're not going to be doing just another self-care program. We're going to learn the difference between the self, which Christ told us we have to crucify, and the soul, which is the part of us that is born again.

You see, the soul reminds us we are not made for ourselves, nor are we made *by* ourselves. The soul was made by God, made for God, and made to need God. We were made to run to God. The soul always exists before God. It is that part of us that will live eternally.

Again, quoting Dallas Willard, “This is the most important thing you can know about your identity: You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.”

As you all know there is heightened racial tension in our country today. We’re all aware of the movement, “Black Lives Matter,” and its counter-part, “Police Lives Matter.” Some folks, wishing to take a higher ground even proclaim “All Lives Matter.”

Do you want to know why black lives matter, and why police lives matter and why ALL lives matter? It’s because we’re made in the image of God. “The Lord God formed man and woman of the dust of the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and they became living souls.”

You and I were made in the image of God, to be in relationship with God, and to love one another because all souls matter. That is the most precious thing about us all. If I lose the sense of holiness about my own soul, then why should I care about another person’s soul and what they’re worth? Remember, all souls matter!

Friends, we are paying far more attention to the care of our cars and trucks, our houses and our lawns, our physical appearance and our social standing than we are to the most precious thing of who we are, our souls. Allow me to quote from Ortberg’s book:

“Your soul is what integrates your will, that is your intentions; your mind, that is to say your thoughts and feelings, your values and

your conscience; and your body (your face, body language and actions) into a single life. A soul is healthy, well-ordered, when there is harmony between these three entities and God's intent for all creation. When you are connected with God and other people in your life, you have a healthy soul." (*Soul Keeping, page 43*)

A healthy soul is balancing and living in harmony. An unhealthy soul is one that lacks integration. Sin always causes the disintegration of the soul. Therefore, one of the first things we need to attend to is our relationship with God, and whether we have placed our lives under God's authority.

A soul was made to live in communion with God. An unhealthy soul chooses to live separated from God, cut off from God, defiant of God's way. The first thing we can do to bring our souls back into harmony with God is to repent, to confess, and to offer our lives back to the care of God. "Not my way, by *your way*, O Lord."

The salvation of our souls is not just about where we go when we die. The word salvation means *healing, or deliverance*, at the deepest levels of who we are in the care of God through the presence of Jesus. Confession, repentance, and surrendering our lives to the care of God will put us back into right relationship with God, and begin the healing process of our souls.

But there is more to the care of our souls than simply confessing sins and "getting right with God." One time John Ortberg had a consultation with Dallas Willard and asked him, "I'm a busy man, Dallas, what can you tell me about how to care for my soul?"

Would you like to hear the answer? In a calm, even voice, Dallas patiently explained, "You must eliminate hurry from your life..."

Hurry is the great enemy of souls in our day. Being busy is mostly a condition of our outer world; it's having many things to do. Being hurried is a problem of the soul.

“It's being so preoccupied with myself and what myself has to do that I am no longer present with God and others. There is no way a soul can thrive when it is hurried. And nobody will come along and unhurry your soul for you.”

So how do we unhurry our souls? We need to make time to be quiet and listen. We need to make time to stop being busy and just pay attention to our souls. This week, set aside 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning or end of each day to reflect on the previous 24 hours.

In what 2 or 3 moments did you recognize your soul at work? It might be an experience of beauty or connection to God; it might be an intimate conversation that connected you in a deep level with another person. Or, perhaps it was an experience of suffering, or a time when you felt an inner conflict, like between your will and your body or your will and your mind.

Begin to pay attention to the inner life. Notice how difficult it is to be quiet for even a short period of time. Become aware of how restless you are. It takes time, but you can do this. Each of us has a soul and our souls long for quiet time. Your soul will guide you as to what it needs.

This is important work that we're doing, soul-work, spiritual formation, yes, even discipleship making. Your soul is the most important thing about you. What will it profit if you gain the whole world, but lose your soul? If you haven't already, let's begin the work of soul keeping. Amen? Amen!