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Maturing toward Wholeness in the Inner Life

Chapter Fourteen

With All Your Soul

The LORD is my shepherd; he restores my soul (Psalm 23:1, 3).

1 - In considering the five components of the human person, which Jesus referred to in Mark 12:29-31, we now come to the soul. It too must be re-formed.

2 - Again, Dallas Willard offers a definition in *Renovation of the Heart* that is extremely insightful:

What is running your life at any moment is your soul. Not external circumstances, or your thoughts, or your intentions, or 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. It is the life center of the human being. It regulates whatever is occurring in each of those dimensions and how they interact with each other and respond to surrounding events in the overall governance of your life. The soul is “deep” in the sense of being basic or foundational and also in the sense that it lies almost totally beyond conscious awareness. (*Renovation of the Heart*, p. 199)

3 - Jesus teaches me to love God with all my soul. If my soul lies almost beyond awareness, how do I gain insight into it? We begin with biblical descriptions.

4 - The soul:

- worships (Luke 1:46)
- longs for God (Psalm 42:1)
- can be troubled (Psalm 6:3)
- can be distraught (Psalm 88:3)
- can be cast down (Psalm 42:5)
- can be quieted (Psalm 131:2)
- can be consoled (Psalm 94:19)
- can desire evil (Psalm 10:3)
- can desire good (Psalm 119:20)
- can be sorrowful (Matthew 26:38)
- can find rest (Matthew 11:29)
- can be strengthened (Acts 14:22)
- can be kept blameless (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
- is saved from wickedness by God’s word (James 1:21)
- is revived through God’s law (Psalm 19:7)
- is preserved by relying on God (Hebrews 10:39)
- finds an anchor in God and his promises (Hebrews 6:19)
- needs guarding (Psalm 25:20)
- waits for God (Psalm 130:5-6)
- can be humbled (Psalm 69:10)
- can be embittered (Psalm 73:21)
- has the capacity to bless (Genesis 27:1-4)
- gives me counsel (Psalm 13:2)
- can be deceived (Luke 12:19-20)

- is the source of obedience (Psalm 119:167)

God has a soul (Psalm 11:5)

5 - If my soul is almost beyond awareness, how do I personally connect with it? One way is the practice of solitude. In solitude I discover that I have a soul.

6 - If my soul is almost beyond awareness, a major way of gaining insight into it is through intuition. But I am always careful to test my intuition by the Bible.

7 - To cultivate spiritual re-formation, I must understand my soul and care for it. It is important to know its needs and respond to them.

8 - **My soul needs creativity**—that which I produce and that which comes from others. My Creator created me creative.

9 - The damaged soul is offered comfort—and healing—in the presence of ennobling art in music, painting, writing, architecture and other forms.

10 - Perhaps the greatest art we can encounter is nature—the artwork of the supreme Creator.

11 - **My soul needs silence.** God is active, and he has spoken. But he is also a God of silence. “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (Psalm 62:1a).

12 - Silence offers the soul the option to withdraw from distractions which do not heal, and can wound further, and to soak in God’s Presence.

13 - **My soul needs rootedness.** Being rooted in a circle of committed relationships is essential to my well-being. I am incomplete without others.

14 - God designed this need to be met in family and church. But just as I have been damaged by sin, so have others in my family and church.

15 - As I mature toward wholeness, Jesus equips me to be an agent of healing. I learn not to demand that others meet my needs; I focus on meeting their needs.

16 - “Place” also plays an important role in rootedness. Where we were born, or the region from which our family comes, is a foundational part of our identity.

17 - The soul’s need for place can be seen in other ways. For example, in the home someone may have a favorite room, or lay claim to a certain chair.

18 - **My soul needs meaning.** When life lacks meaning, only boredom and will-power remain. The soul cannot endure meaninglessness very long.

19 - An empty soul is the fruit of living apart from God. Only in and with God does the human person find meaning that endures.

20 - The empty soul seeks meaning in that which is superficial. What is superficial cannot meet a need that is deep.

21 - The empty soul may look for meaning in that which is evil. What is evil will only damage the soul further.

22 - The needs of the human soul are fully and forever satisfied by being relationally reconciled with its Creator through the cross of Christ.

23 - **My soul needs order.** Those who create chaotic environments are expressing chaotic souls. A life of obedience to God is orderly—structured.

24 - God is a God of order. He created an orderly universe. “All things should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

25 - One of God’s provisions for our need for order is his law. “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Psalm 19:7a).

26 - There can be confusion among Christians about God’s law. The law never claims to justify us before God. Nothing can do that except Christ’s cross.

27 - God’s law expresses his nature and his ways. It is his precious gift to mankind. It offers insight and order for life in grace.

28 - It has been said that God’s law is not the *source* of righteousness, but it is the *course* of righteousness.

29 - Jesus: “Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18b).

30 - **My soul needs God’s Presence.** I am created for God’s Presence as a fish is created for water. Away from God, my soul grows empty, then chaotic.

31 - As I learn how to live in God’s Presence my soul is restored. “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning” (Psalm 130:6a).

32 - How can I understand the difference between my heart and my soul? I have far-reaching, often immediate, influence over my choices (heart).

33 - Influence over my soul is more indirect and delayed. The state of my soul is progressively shaped by—becomes an expression of—the choices of my heart.

34 - As I intend with my heart to rely on God and live in his Presence, the Spirit does the work of re-shaping my soul. My soul matures toward Christlikeness.

35 - As Christlikeness forms in my soul it shapes the actions of my heart, mind (thoughts and emotions), body and social relationships.

36 - The most basic issue of my Christian life is not my behavior. Good fruit comes from a good tree. My behavior expresses the kind of person I am becoming.

37 - Over time my soul takes on a certain character—predictable ways in which I will choose, think, feel, respond bodily and relate.

38 - The soul does not remain static. Each person's soul has been formed and continues to be formed. It can also be re-formed.

39 - "This is just the kind of person I am." Perhaps not. Believing I cannot change only shows I have been unable to change by relying on myself.

40 - Believing I cannot change denies the Gospel. It dismisses God's promises and power. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

41 - I make choices. My choices lead to behaviors. These behaviors have consequences. I respond to these consequences. All this forms my soul.

42 - Obedience to God re-forms my soul anew. Obedience requires heart choices and bodily actions. What I do with my body affects my soul.

43 - A soul formed apart from God becomes increasingly fragmented, disordered, chaotic. The likelihood that I will harm myself and others increases.

44 - The soul can be shaken in crises when it is only relying on itself—illness, financial loss, relational failure, death of a loved one (Psalm 62:1-2).

45 - The Bible calls the condition of a fragmented, chaotic, destructive soul "death"—the state of every soul apart from Christ (Romans 1:18-31).

46 - God at times judges sin by choosing not to intervene. He lets man experience the consequences of evil choices and behaviors emanating from ruined souls.

47 - We may bring God's judgment on ourselves. We may choose it. But we can change our choices—repentance! In sending his Son, God invites us to do so.

48 - Good News (the Gospel)—souls can be re-formed—brought from death to life. We have not been left in the hell of slavery to destructive habits and behaviors.

49 - A soul centered in God comes to rest. It has returned home. My whole being, in spite of what is going on around me, finds order and peace.

50 - A soul not centered in God remains fragmented. It can't find its way home. It is lost. One's whole being trends toward chaos and unwanted behaviors.

51 - We read almost daily of politicians, athletes, executives, entertainers, religious leaders who are self-destructing due to disordered souls.

52 - "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psalm 103:1).
Come, Holy Spirit. Fill my soul!

