

No Big Deal Until It Is Healthy Soul

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TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Romans 8:5 (NLT)

5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

Colossians 2:8 (NLT)

8 Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5 (NLT)

5 We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

Romans 8:6 (NLT)

6 So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

Philippians 4:8 (NLT)

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Psalms 139:23-24 (NLT)

*23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

Matthew 25:32-46 (NLT)

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What's your favorite activity that helps you to cultivate a healthy mind and soul and in what ways does it help you?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- Jeff said, "A healthy soul flows from a healthy mind." **Read Romans 8:5** and **Colossians 2:8**. List the contrasts between being ruled by a sinful nature or by the Spirit.
- How does having a healthy mind contribute to having a healthy soul?
- **Read 2 Corinthians 10:5**. How do believers guard against sinful thoughts? Why is that so important? For reference, read **Romans 8:6**.
- **Read Matthew 25:32-46**. What is sin? How does and will it effect the soul of a believer? Of an unbeliever?
- Jeff listed two things we can do to proactively prevent evil thoughts from taking over and corroding our minds. What are they? **Read Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:2, and Psalm 139:23-24** for reference. What effect would following those verses have on the patterns of our sinful thoughts and the corrosive consequences of those thoughts for our soul?
- **Joshua 1:8a** says, "Study this book of instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night." How can meditating on God's word 'day and night' keep us on a right path?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- This week, prayerfully ask God to search your heart and to show you where changes need to be made.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Praise God that He knows you and that His hand is over your life. Ask Him to reveal to you those parts of you that are not obedient to His will for you and to help you submit to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Question: "What is soul care? What is care of the soul?"

Answer: It is common to refer to human beings as made up of body, soul, and spirit. Although human beings are integrated wholes, this division is a helpful way to refer to the three main components of human existence. The distinction is helpful, even though there is some debate over the separateness of the soul and spirit. Some theologians prefer to see humans as simply material and immaterial beings without a strict distinction between soul and spirit. It may be that the immaterial side simply has a “soulish” aspect and a spiritual aspect rather than being two separate things—soul and spirit.

The spirit may be defined as the immaterial part of a human being that has the capacity to relate to God. A person, outside of Christ, is spiritually dead and unable to respond to God in an appropriate way (see Ephesians 2:1–6 and Romans 8:5–8).

The soul is the immaterial part of a human being that can respond to other people. In Greek the word for “soul” is *psyche* from which we get the word *psychology*. The soul involves the mind and emotions. It gives us the capacity to relate to others and to form bonds. It is our souls that respond to beauty and high ideals. People with healthy souls are capable of forming meaningful relationships, and people with unhealthy souls find it more difficult. Soul care is the attention given to healing a wounded soul or maintaining a healthy soul. In a Christian context, soul care is often linked to finding help to overcome temptations, fight addictions, and have peace with God.

At this point it is helpful once again to make a distinction between soul and spirit. Sin and spiritual death affect the whole person. Our bodies feel the effects of sin, and so do our souls. Some people have healthier souls than others and are thus better able to have healthy relationships. If a person with an unhealthy soul attends counseling or even enters into the treatment of a psychologist, he or she may be able to make changes that will improve personal relationships and the level of functioning in society. However, this improvement of the soul will not change a person’s eternal destiny, nor will it give him or her spiritual life. Likewise, a person who has become spiritually alive in Christ may still have a damaged soul and may be in need of soul care. Some believers have to work long and hard to overcome bad habits and destructive patterns. Such struggles often continue all of their lives.

Many people who speak of “spiritual life” or “spirituality” are really speaking of the wondrous capacities of the soul, apart from a relationship with God. Sometimes this is referred to as the “inner life.” These people are often speaking of an appreciation for beauty and wonder, as well as qualities like honesty, openness, and kindness, which are conducive to forming authentic relationships with other people. They speak of tranquility, inspiration, and self-confidence. While these may be attained in some measure apart from a relationship with God, the best medicine for an unhealthy soul is a healthy spirit—one that has been animated by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ. Many in popular culture wrongly assume that the greatest need for mankind is soul care and that the “spiritual” is simply a tool for attaining inner peace and health in the realm of the soul.

Thomas Moore’s book *Care of the Soul* has been a bestseller for the past 25 years. From the back of the 25th anniversary edition: “Promising to deepen and broaden the reader’s perspective on his or her own life experiences, Moore draws on his own life as a therapist practicing ‘care of the soul,’ as well as his studies of the world’s religions and his work in music and art, to create this inspirational guide that examines the connections between spirituality and the problems of individuals and society.” In this book the “spiritual” truth that is offered is actually inspirational truth pulled from the world’s religions. If a person follows the advice that Moore gives in his book, that person’s *soul* may indeed become healthier, but his or her *spirit* will still be dead apart from Christ, just as a good diet and exercise will improve the body while doing nothing for the spirit (see 1 Timothy 4:8). Thus, Moore’s book is accurately titled *Care of the Soul*, because, while it focuses on the soul, it will do nothing help a person attain spiritual life.

Some ministries practice soul care from a biblical basis. One such ministry, called Soul Care, is dedicated to helping Christians develop healthy souls. The Seven Pillars that are promoted by this organization are Prayer, Use of Scripture, Soul Searching, Simplicity, Solitude/Silence, Spiritual Friendship, and Journaling. These pillars are similar to what others would call “spiritual disciplines.” Practices for caring for the soul, as those caring for the body, can be either biblical or unbiblical. Christians should avoid any practices of soul care that are unbiblical. Likewise, some practices for caring for the soul (meditation, listening to music, making restitution for wrongs done, decluttering one’s life, and performing random acts of kindness) may be based on common grace and therefore helpful without imparting spiritual life, just some practices are helpful in caring for the body but do not yield a resurrection body.

God cares for the whole person, and soul care can be a valid ministry to others. We serve “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). The Lord wants to transform us and renew our minds (Romans 12:2). John’s short letter to Gaius expressed a godly concern for Gaius’s health: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 John 1:2). Though the term *soul care* is never found in the Bible, John was certainly involved in a form of soul care as he ministered to the Body of Christ.