

What a SOUL NEEDS

We know a lot about how to care for our bodies. Our diet and exercise habits are well-informed. But what about our souls? Most problems are soul problems. Your soul is your deepest you—and God loves your deepest you. How do we take care of our souls? We need to nourish our inner lives and become people whose hearts, minds, wills and bodies are integrated and whole. This summer, we look to the middle chapters of Matthew to discover what the soul needs to find health and peace—resting in the hands of a God who loves us.

VALUE • Matthew 10: 24-31 • John Goodale • June 25, 2017

Thomas Lawrence was a British scholar and soldier, and perhaps best known as Lawrence of Arabia. In 1919, Lawrence attended the Paris Peace Talks, and brought some of his Arabian friends with him. What fascinated these men the most wasn't the Louvre, or the Arc de Triomphe, or the culture of France. No, what fascinated them most were the faucets in their bathrooms, which provided limitless water when turned on!

Imagine Lawrence's surprise when preparing to depart Paris, to discover that his friends had secured plumbing tools and were seeking to remove these faucets—for they reasoned that the faucets would provide all the water they needed back in Arabia! Lawrence had to explain that the water actually came from a deeper, unseen source, which then fed the water through the faucets.

We chuckle at this limited awareness—yet we can have a similar perspective when it comes to our lives. We place great value upon external activity most visibly seen in our lives, but overlook the value of our soul deep within—a reservoir out of which life flows.

Dallas Willard wrote of this resource: "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 we do . . . and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream." Our soul has greater value than we often realize, for it provides order and meaning to all that we do.

Jesus emphasizes the value of our soul in this text. In the larger context of the passage, He's warning about persecution and hardship to come. Jesus instructs here that when it does, His followers should not be afraid of those who kill the body but not the soul.

"Do not be afraid" is a frequent exhortation from God and His messengers to His people. It speaks to His tender understanding of how easily we can be afraid, and God's desire to put our hearts at rest. The phrase, "Do not be afraid" appears 3 times alone in today's text. So it's a bit surprising that in this same passage we also find Jesus instructing us to be afraid. That this is so out of character points to the importance of what He's communicating.

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but

cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). Jesus is reminding us of the eternal nature of our soul, urging us to value it above all else. One day we will each stand before God, who will determine our soul's destination—and we're preparing even now for that moment.

Last week Tim preached on our soul's need for a savior. Jesus valued our soul so much, He gave His life to save it. In this passage, He's talking about our need to value our soul, in the choices we make about it. If you've never committed your soul and life to God, I urge you to consider doing so, and to talk with a pastor. For our soul has greater value than we often realize, and it will last forever. C.S. Lewis understood this reality when he wrote, "Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

The question before us, is how do we value and care for our soul? It's not easy to become more attentive to the part of us that's least easily seen. We may find ourselves wincing at any suggestion of adding one more thing to lives that are already overflowing. But here's the thing: If we don't care for and value our soul today, we'll pay a price in the long run. For our soul gives order and meaning to everything we do, and it will live forever. The valuing we do or don't give to this source of life deep within will make all the difference in our quality of life that emerges externally and eternally.

Years ago, a story was told of a traveler making his way across Africa, who hired local people to transport his camp. They made greater progress the first day than he had hoped, and then again on the second day, leaving him to anticipate reaching his destination on the third day. He was surprised that third morning, though, to discover that his hired help were not preparing the camp for travel—they were simply sitting around, doing nothing. Angrily, he asked the translator what was going on, and this was the response he received: "They've gone so far, so fast, that they are waiting for their souls to catch up."

Would we value our soul in similar ways, and take steps to care for it? One of the best ways we care for our soul is by giving it rest; in fact, this is so important, Tim will spend an entire sermon on our

soul's need for rest in three weeks. Let me encourage us, between now and then, to be thinking about how we can build rest for our soul into our lives—to allow our soul to catch up when we've gone too far, too fast. Beyond rest, I want to offer two other ways we value and care for our soul.

First, **we connect our soul with its author.** When we do, we're most likely to experience the words of Psalm 23, "He restores my soul." (Psalm 23:3). Our soul was made to crave connection and alignment with the one who created it. This is what prompts the psalmist to write, "My soul thirsts for God..." (Ps. 42:2). If you use a computer, now and again it will indicate a need to re-start so necessary updates can be installed. The same is true of our soul. God has programmed our internal software, so to speak. We value and care for our soul by allowing it to re-boot, to be re-connected with its operating system.

You see, our soul's ultimate value is found in its connection with God. God created our soul. He loves it. And He saved it at great cost to Himself. Each day, He longs to build up our soul, healing the damage done to it by the world, and sometimes by us. He wants to nurture, strengthen, and deepen our soul's capacity to remain calm in the midst of turbulence. God values our soul more deeply than we often realize, and He longs for us to do the same by regularly bringing it to Him.

Again, this is not easy. Activity fills our days, hindering us from being available and responsive to God. Carving out times for our soul to be with God can too often feel like we're going against the flow. But we value our soul by making the effort to connect it with its Creator. One of the things I've come to value most are periods of silence in the morning—not praying or being active, but providing quiet space for my soul. Yes, my mind wanders far more than I'd like. But I picture myself simply sitting with God, bringing my soul to Him. Then I'll journal my prayers to God, articulating to Him whatever feels heavy upon my soul that day.

Each of us will connect our soul with God in different ways. The important thing is that we value our soul enough to consistently create opportunities for it to be with its Maker.

Second, **we listen to our soul.** The Psalmist models this again in Ps. 42 when he writes: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Ps. 42:5, 11) Not only is the soul our source

of life, it can be jostled by the events of life. Our soul can become a holding place of fear, anxiety, stress, or uncertainty. Listening to our soul helps us better understand when and why things are amiss within us. When our soul is connected with its Creator, our questions of it actually become prayers for understanding from God. "God, why am I feeling so off-balance within right now; what's causing that?"

Parker Palmer has written, "The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy. It knows how to survive in hard places. But it is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out."

Listening to our soul requires us to slow down and to quiet down. To shift our focus from the external to the internal, so that in the quietness of the moment, we can hear God's words to us thru our soul.

How do we do this, in the midst of all the noise and activity? I've found the soul assessment card helpful that was distributed the first week of the series. I've used it some mornings as a way of asking my soul how it's doing on that day. Additional copies are available at the reception desk, if you'd like to utilize this resource during this series and beyond.

Perhaps we use our driving time to ask our soul, "Why did I respond to that person the way I did today?" Or, "Why do I feel so anxious about the day before me?" And then, we listen to whatever God might reveal. Most of us hate to wait in lines. Why not make them soul check-up moments, for 2-3 minutes—or longer, if it's a bad line! As we're standing there, ask our soul how it's doing that day, and listen for what God might say to us.

As we learn to listen to our soul, we become more attuned to things we've previously missed. Our awareness of what we're thankful for can increase, leading to a greater perspective of gratitude. Or we better sense and are responsive to stirrings of God's still, small whisper within.

We value the soul enough to listen for what God longs to reveal to us thru it.

In his book, *Soul Keeping*, John Ortberg tells the following story: There once was a town, high in the Alps that straddled the banks of a beautiful stream. The stream was fed by springs higher up the moun-

tain, and its water was so clear that children played on its banks, swans swam in it, and people traveled to see its beauty.

High above the town was an old man who had been hired as the keeper of the stream. He removed debris from the springs above, ensuring that the water remained clear and pure. No one could remember how long he'd been hired for this role, and his work was unseen.

One year the town council determined that they had more pressing issues than to continue employing this keeper of the stream, whose work went unsupervised—so they let him go. Over time, debris began to build up in the springs, muddying the water; mud and sediment gathered at the bottom of the stream above the town. At first, no one noticed a difference in the water—but then it became obvious that it was brackish. The swans flew away to cleaner water. People in the town became sick. And others stopped visiting the town and its stream.

The town council reconvened and decided to rehire the keeper of the stream. He returned to his work, and after awhile the quality of the stream began to improve until it was eventually clear and pure again. Children played at its banks again. Swans returned to swim there. And people again traveled to see the beauty of the town and its stream.

Ortberg concludes his story with these words: **“The stream is your soul. And you are the keeper.”** The stream is your soul, and you are the keeper. In the days ahead, how will you seek to be the keeper of your soul? Will you connect your soul with its author and creator in a way that's life-giving for your soul and for you? Will you listen to your soul in ways that enable you to hear what God longs to reveal to you through it?

Your soul has tremendous value to God. He made it. He saved it. And He wants to enjoy all of eternity with it. May we value our soul no less.

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STUDY GUIDE

“What a Soul Needs: Value” • Matthew 10:24-31

Start It

- We all value different things in life. For some of us, it may be quality family vacations that we look forward to, knowing they'll create precious memories. For others, it's moments of fun and excitement during our week. We may value the meaningfulness and significance of our work or volunteering, or the enjoyment of a hobby or relaxation. Many of us certainly value good friends. Have you ever thought about how much of what you value is external in your life, vs. what's within you?

Study It

- Read Matthew 10:24-31. In the larger context of this passage, Jesus is warning his followers about persecution and hardship to come. Three times in this passage alone, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid” (10:26, 28, 31). What does this tell us about God's understanding of our tendency towards fear, and of His desire to put our hearts at rest?
- Read Matthew 10:28. What do you note about Jesus contrast between the value of our body and the value of our soul? In the midst of repeated exhortations in this passage to not be afraid, it seems strange to find him also telling us in this verse that we should be afraid. What do you think is the message that Jesus is trying to convey? How does this reminder of the immortal nature of our souls shape how we treat them today?
- Read Psalm 42:1-2. In what ways do you experience your soul's thirst for God—and what practices in your life enable you to be responsive to this thirst?
- Read Psalm 42:5, 11. What can we learn from the Psalmist's example about valuing our soul enough to listen to it, so that we can hear what God longs to reveal to us through our soul?
- Read Psalm 23:3. In what ways have you experienced God's restoration of your soul over the years? To what degree is your soul in need of this restoration today?

Pray It

Lord Jesus, how wonderful it is that You would love and value my soul so much—even to the point of giving Your life for it! Please forgive me for the many times when I've not valued my soul as much as You do. Teach me how to care for and be responsive to my soul as the precious and eternal part of me that it is. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Live It

Jesus valued your soul so much that He gave His life to save it; in what ways will you value your soul this week?