

Soul Discovery - Part Three

Finding Application

How do we love God with our souls? This is one of those questions in life that causes us to really think. Jesus said the greatest commandment of all was to love God with our heart, our mind, and our soul. If loving God in this way is so important, you would think that two thousand years of Christianity passed down from generation to generation would have preserved exactly how to do this. It makes sense that loving God with our heart is not allowing anything to take His place as first in our lives. Loving God with our mind also makes sense when we control our thoughts and keep them focused on Jesus. Loving God with our soul is a somewhat ambiguous concept. Common thinking is that it is the soul that lives forever. As we discovered in the first two articles in this series, that is not exactly correct, and it certainly doesn't help us understand how to live out the Great Commandment.

The working definition that we arrived at previously is that the soul is the energy of life, including emotions and actions. It is not our flesh, but what we do while in our flesh. Of course, we have the ability to direct this at will. Our soul is made up of our good and bad habits, our victories and defeats. Our soul's state of well-being, as related to serving God or serving ourselves, is evident in how we spend our time, money, talents, and energy. In short, our soul is the sum total of the way we spend our life.

Hopefully, this is a clear definition. Maybe a bit overwhelming, but clear nonetheless. Overwhelming? Consider that Jesus said that loving God with our soul is part of the greatest commandment of all. Just think, reading this right now, the way you have spent your time and money and energy in the past six months tells the tale of what you have loved with your soul. Anyone can figure it out just by knowing all the facts of how you have lived. Therein is the challenge for us as individuals--no one knows all the facts about you except for you and God. We can put on a good front and hide much from everyone else about where we spent our energy, but God knows. Overwhelming? Yes.

But Jesus said it was part of the greatest commandment. There is no getting around it.

How do we get there? How can we live for years loving God with our souls? Maybe we would benefit from an example.

In late 1985, a quiet but disciplined young man in his late twenties began to discuss with his wife the possibility of publishing a monthly Christian paper. Ray McManus had a desire to serve the Lord. He worked full-time as an engineer. His wife, Deborah, had just had their first child, a daughter, Rebekah. The couple lived two hours away from the nearest set of grandparents, so convenient assistance with child care wasn't a luxury. Yet, he was determined to begin publishing The Harvester.

Considerable time would be needed to accomplish all the various steps for the paper. Remember, 1985 was the year Microsoft Windows was released - no convenient word processor applications were in existence. For over a decade, Ray used an electric typewriter. He had to count all the lines and spaces manually, and then typed. Talk about tedious! To help cut down on time, he bought a DOS based computer that would sort and print the labels for the Harvester. The paper became a perpetual part of the young family's life. The process of writing articles, manually formatting the paper, taking the finished copy to the printer, folding by hand and labeling the 200 copies in the initial distribution, all by a monthly deadline, took considerable planning, dedication, and endurance.

The couple moved to Mobile, AL and a second child, Ben, was born. The Harvester continued, still with use of a typewriter. Recognize that moving involved changing Post Offices and printers. Another move to Gadsden, AL changed the steps of the process again. Ray worked lots of overtime in his job with Alabama Power. To complete the Harvester he would stay up late and get up early. More moves. In all the family would move eight times. The Harvester never stopped.

After almost 13 years using manual formatting, Ray converted to a word processor application for the first time in the late 90's. During this time the family lived in the same city where I was a student. For just over six months I was privileged to attend services with the McManus family at the Sun Hill Road congregation in Birmingham, AL. All of my life I had known Ray would send out Harvesters

once per month. Never did I know it took so much work. I gained a small taste of the needed effort and discipline—during this time in my life I began sending out a daily motivational email. Every day, even when I was overloaded, the regimen I set for myself demanded that I write. Brother Ray was very supportive of my efforts. He, more than I realized, understood.

To get others involved, and I'm sure to save a little time, one Sunday night per month Brother Ray would bring the fresh-off-the-press Harvesters to the church building and everyone would help fold, label, and sort. The next day they would go in the mail, and the monthly process would start over.

In the winter of 2000, the McManus family made their final move—to Woodland, AL. Ray's article in March of that year was titled "Home At Last." The couple began new careers as school teachers. It was a different kind of stress, and for the first time in fifteen years Ray considered stopping the publication. He was unsure of its effectiveness. Though discouraged, he remained faithful to the path he had chosen. The Harvester continued, and he never mentioned quitting again.

The paper grew. Initially the distribution was about 200. Brother Ray did all of the work and most of the financing. While maintaining a job and keeping up the Harvester, he also maintained monthly speaking appointments at the congregations where he and his family regularly attended, and he also spoke in revivals at several churches. Over the course 19 years, 8 job changes, 8 moves, and raising two children from birth (of course, with the help of his wife), the Harvester grew to a distribution near 1,100. Though filled with short articles and Gospel Meeting announcements, the paper became a monthly fixture among the brethren that received it.

Tragedy struck. In October of 2004, Brother Ray made one more move, this time to an eternal home.

An unsuspecting, quiet man gave countless hours of his life to publish a small paper, all for the express purpose of encouraging his brothers and sisters in their walk with the Lord. To see him at church, smiling, quietly handing out the Harvester as he leaned against one of the back pews, you might never think he had worked on it so hard. In his

life, this effort went largely unappreciated. But now, especially for those who are close to the continued efforts to publish the Harvester, it is quite clear that our brother was a man of many talents, with great discipline, organization, and endurance.

He gave his time, money, talent, and energy to a publication he believed would encourage the Christians around him. This wasn't easy. He had to have great discipline to meet the deadlines, and great organization to keep the paper going during the eight different times he moved his family. There were few, if any, accolades for his efforts. Yet he persevered. He was striving to serve the Lord in the way that he could. And he maintained this pace for almost the last 20 years of his life. It is easy to see, Brother Ray truly loved the Lord **with all of his soul**.

How can we learn to love the Lord with our souls? After much meditation on this passage, I believe the answer is contained within the Great Commandment itself. The key is our thoughts—loving the Lord with all of our mind. We do this *one thought at a time, one day at a time*. Jesus said in Luke 12:34: "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" The things we choose to think about repeatedly, enough that they become a treasure to us, those things will determine where our heart is. For Brother Ray, reaching and inspiring others through the Harvester was a *treasure*.

Jesus also said we are to love the Lord with all of our heart. With God in his proper place in our lives—first—we will likely feel the passion that Isaiah felt when he cried "*here am I, send me!*" (Isa 6:8). This desire is necessary for us to love the Lord with our souls. When coupled with knowledge, discipline, and endurance (2 Pet 1:5-6), lifetime achievements, such as Brother Ray's efforts with the Harvester, are left to inspire many generations for the cause of Christ.

What about your life? What can you do with your life to show others that you love the Lord with your soul? Let's ask a few probing questions:

- What does the way you have spent your money over the last five years say to the world about where your treasure is? Do you live beyond your means with a load of debt? Do you live within your means and give to God with your first fruits?

- What about how you spend your time? Do you have to be a workaholic to maintain your lifestyle/spending? Do you have hobbies that consume a good deal of your time and energy that have little or no usefulness for the cause of Christ? Do you give up your personal freedom and use or develop your talents to inspire and encourage the Christians around you?
- Are you consumed with your own interests to the point you sometimes ignore your spouse or children? Do you invest your time and energy regularly to train up your children so that they love the Lord? This pursuit has a relatively short time frame - children are most impressionable for the first 5-10 years of their lives. A strong, thriving marriage requires constant effort. Is your marriage healthy, or does it need some attention?

In answer to these questions, consider that...

- ...recognizing the greed of overspending, repenting of it, and disciplining yourself over a period of months to eliminate debt so you can have more to give is loving the Lord with your soul.
- ...choosing to let go of hobbies that consume your time or finding a way to use them to truly encourage others (not just enjoying the hobby with friends), and giving your personal time to a spiritual pursuit (visiting the sick, writing a letter of encouragement, helping those who are already active in ministry efforts, deepening your Bible knowledge) is loving the Lord with your soul.
- ...recognizing that the relationship between a husband and wife is supposed to reflect the image of Christ and the church, and putting in the effort and giving the support to keep the fire alive is loving God with your soul.
- ...making the daily effort to steer the lives of your children, grandchildren, or other young people you may influence in the direction they need to go to serve God is loving the Lord with your soul.

It is my prayer that by reflecting on this series of articles you will examine your life and make efforts to love the Lord with all of your soul. It is a process that will involve your entire life: your work, your play, your family, your friends, your money, and your time. And remember, Jesus included this in what He called the

greatest commandment of all.

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: How can we make our marriages be the way that God wants them to be? What is the best way to deal with problems in a marriage?

ANSWER: We live in a society that no longer views marriage in the high and noble light that it should be held in. In fact, there are those who propagate the theory that marriage has served its purpose and is no longer needed in today's society. This is evidenced by the large percentage of people who live together outside of marriage as well as the number of people who see nothing wrong with divorce. This should be of no surprise. As our culture becomes more and more secular we find that there is little thought of God, His will, or His glory. Therefore it is refreshing to see someone take an interest in desiring marriage to be the way God intended for it to be.

We begin by pointing out that God has a redemptive purpose in giving the state of marriage to mankind. In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes,

"Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great

mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Eph. 5:25-32)

This passage is often read and quoted in marriage ceremonies but unfortunately little thought is given to the truth which it speaks. While it outlines the duties of husbands and wives to one another there should not be a disconnect between these duties and the purpose marriage is to fulfill. While there are many things marriage does, one of the most important is that it is to model to the world the relationship between Christ and His church. Unbelievers should, by being around godly couples, glean a basic understanding of how Christ and His church relate. When we as Christians do not have marriages that demonstrate this relationship we are robbing God of the glory that marriage is to bring to His name. Remember everything we do falls under the great umbrella of God's glory. We are to reflect the glory of the Lord to the world around us. Marriage is one of the many ways we can do that.

Why do we have marriage problems to begin with? What is the source? The answer is simple: we are sinners! Sin is the cause of marriage problems. Go back and read in Genesis chapter 2 how Adam responded when presented with Eve. She was accepted and in his words called flesh of his flesh! But after the fall, how quick he was to blame her for their situation. Also notice how they tried to hide their nakedness. This represents the loss of transparency that had been part of the relationship before they sinned. This should suffice to illustrate that we have problems in our marriage due to the fact that we are sinners.

Sin in marriage manifests itself in two basic ways. First, we have the problem with wrong concepts concerning marriage. Take for example a man who reads that he is the head of the house so he thinks this means he is to be lord and master of all under his roof leaving off the love and concern he is to have for his spouse. He needs to learn what is meant by being the head! Secondly, sin shows itself in wrong practices or behaviors. Again a good example would be how we handle anger. Many times people either blow up or clam up when things get difficult. While anger itself is not wrong both of these expressions of it are.

The solutions to marriage problems are found in scripture. The scripture is inspired and able to make us perfect or whole. They are profitable for teaching, reproof,

correction and instruction in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Problems with error in concepts are to replace the error with truth. Problems in practice or behavior are to be handled by replacing the sinful practices with new godly behaviors learned from the scriptures.

In addition to learning why we have marriage problems it is important to also recognize that there are some basics that are fundamental to good marriages that must be kept in mind. In the space that remains we will turn our attention to those matters.

In order to have a marriage that is pleasing unto God we must remember that next to God's glory we add the idea of companionship. Marriage was instituted in order to provide companionship. In the first chapters of Genesis we read of God's creative work. His crowning act was to make man in His image. While all that God had created was good, God said it was "not good for man to be alone". All couples, in order to have a good marriage, must realize that they are married so that they might provide companionship for their spouse.

This brings us to the next point; the obligation of marriage. As we noted above the purpose is companionship. The obligation is not to receive it but to give it. Many times marriages experience trouble because we lose focus of what it is all about. Sin has made all of us selfish to some degree, some more than others, but all of us have a selfish bent. This can be very destructive to a marriage. We must realize that when married we have taken a vow to give companionship, not to receive it. Marriage is an act of love (not emotional infatuation) where we enter into a covenant, and we are bound to meet the needs of another person. Notice that this is being other-oriented and not selfish.

The final thing to remember is the commitment of marriage. There will always be minor problems in our marriages but we must be committed to the marriage so that we will solve the problem rather than separating. The relationship, in order to be an honor to God, must have constant commitment and intimacy. Our commitment flows from the covenant we made before God.

This is not an exhaustive treatment of marriage problems, and we admit that much more could be written. We hope that

this will give our readers a starting point and some food for thought as we seek to honor and glorify God in our marriages.

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
April 3 – 5	Cloud Nine Sierra Vista, AZ	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
April 6 – 8	21 st and Country Club Tucson, AZ	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
April 6 – 10	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
April 6 – 10	Liberty Liberty, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 10 – 12	Valley Valley, AL	Kevin Mills (Newnan, GA)
April 13 – 17	Owen's Road Prattville, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
April 17 – 19	Winchester Winchester, OH	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
April 19 – 23	Willow Shade Willow Shade, KY	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
April 19 – 25	West Broad Street Wedowee, AL	Carley Conner (Cookeville, TN)
April 20 – 24	Mt. Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
April 27 – May 1	Chestnut Grove Parksville, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Remember last month's questions?

1. During Jacob's dream about a ladder reaching into Heaven, what did God tell him his descendants would be compared to? THE DUST OF THE EARTH (Gen. 28:14)
2. In Esther who was hanged on a gallows for an alleged plot to murder the king? TWO OF THE KING'S CHAMBERLAINS (Est. 2:21-23)
3. Who was the king of Babylon when the "handwriting on the wall" incident occurred? BELSHAZZAR (Dan. 5:1-5)
4. What is Jesus' name for Peter, "Cephas," translated to mean? A STONE (John 1:42)
5. In Galatians who did Paul use as symbols of freedom and bondage? ISAAC AND HAGAR (Gal. 4:22-31)