

The Ordered Heart

I went away in the first week of my retreat, and the sun was out: it was hot. I took my body board to Porthcothan and strode out into the waves. After catching a few I noticed another group who were splashing about in the shallows and wondered why they weren't coming up to the point where the waves broke – it was much more exciting, and instead they were just catching the small surf in the shallows. For them it was predictable, safe and low risk, but they were missing out on so much.

I am no great surfer (hence the body board) and deploy no skill. It is all about taking the board out and positioning yourself and then seeing what happens.

There were two metaphors at play for me – one is that the wave is the grace of God. You just have to put yourself in the right position and then you get taken for a fantastic ride. It didn't always come off – at times I missed the wave, at other times I wiped out. But I also hit the surf and had a fantastic time.

For those in the shallows they were missing out – on the wipe outs as much as the rides.

Discipleship is all about walking past the shallows and into where the wave breaks, with the risk, the excitement and the rewards. Staying in the shallows is avoidance of risk, but there are no rewards. Is it really a choice? But it is a choice that looking around modern church in our culture (developed western democracy) most people seem to have taken – or fallen into by default.

'The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it is who you become. That's what you will take into eternity.' Dallas Willard.

Do we have a choice? Why should I take this path?

The wider question here is – is there a choice between

- a. following Jesus closely as a disciple – imitating him and his practices and making this your primary life goal
- b. being part of the religion 'Christianity' and adopting some of the practices but not pursuing it wholeheartedly – attending church as one of a selection of life choices, one of a number of priorities, and not necessarily no.1

I have wrestled with this question long and hard as a church leader, and I believe that there are three compelling reasons why someone would want to follow Jesus as a disciple.

Why do we want to be like Jesus?

1. He calls you to follow him
2. Sin leads to death. Its not nice. It doesn't work out well for you
3. Our hearts are tuned to wholeness with Jesus at the centre. Only in that state will we find peace.

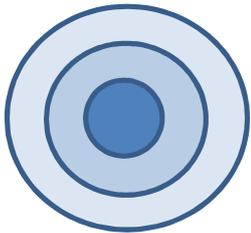
What is your soul?

"What is running your life at any given moment is your soul. Not external circumstances, not your thoughts, not your intentions, not 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. The soul is the life center of human beings. You're a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God."
(Dallas Willard, quoted by John Ortberg in Soul Keeping)

Anytime you want to care for something – in order for it to work well – you need to understand it and how it works. That’s why I take my car to the garage – I don’t understand it but someone does and knows how to make it work well. No-one can care for my soul other than me – there is no garage I can task with sorting it out. We alone are responsible for the upkeep of our souls.

And it is very beneficial for us to keep our souls working well: if your soul is healthy, no external circumstance can destroy your life. If your soul is unhealthy, no external circumstance can redeem your life.

The situations in which we find ourselves are never as important as our responses to them, which come from our “spiritual” side. A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations before which others stand like helpless children saying “Why?”



Inside is your will – your capacity to choose. You can say yes or no – it is what makes you a person and not a thing. God made us to ‘exercise dominion’. The will is actually quite limited – very good at making large scale decisions (where to live, who to marry etc) but limited at overriding habits, attitudes and patterns of behaviour.

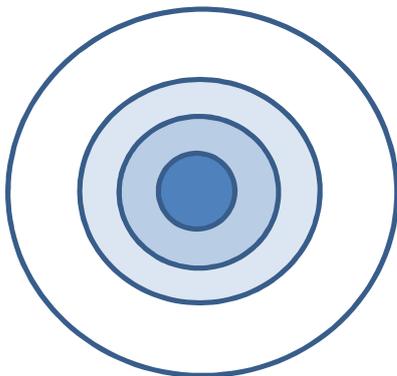
Next we have the mind – thoughts and feelings.

Romans 8:5-6 says: *‘Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.’*

The outer circle is our bodies. The body is our kingdom – the one place in all the universe where our wills have a chance to be in charge.

Some of our behaviours are ‘outsourced’ so our minds and wills don’t have to worry about them – like driving a car, making a cup of tea, getting dressed. Steve Jobs used to wear the same clothes each day so as to not use up unnecessary mental energy that could be used for more important decisions.

Let’s add another circle – the soul.



The soul is the capacity to integrate all the parts into a single, whole life. Think of it like an operating system.

Integrity: the state of being whole and undivided.

synonyms: unity, unification, wholeness, coherence, cohesion, undividedness, togetherness, solidarity, coalition

The soul seeks harmony, connection and integration of our will, mind and body, and also with God, with creation and with each other.

It integrates your will (your intentions), your mind (thoughts, feelings, values and conscience) and your body (face, body language and actions) into a single life.

When a soul is healthy (well-ordered) there is harmony between these three entities and God’s intent for all creation. When there is harmony between these three entities, and when you are connected with God and other people, you have a healthy soul.

We live from our heart. The part of us that drives and organizes our life is not the physical. This remains true even if we deny it. You have a spirit within you and it has been formed. It has taken on a specific character. I have a spirit and it has been formed. This is true of everyone.

The human spirit is an inescapable, fundamental aspect of every human being; and it takes on whichever character it has from the experiences and the choices that we have lived through or made in our past. That is what it means for it to be “formed.”

Our life and how we find the world now and in the future is, almost totally, a simple result of what we have become in the depths of our being—in our spirit, will, or heart. From there we see our world and interpret reality. From there we make our choices, break forth into action, try to change our world. We live from our depths—most of which we do not understand.

A disordered soul

An unhealthy soul is one that experiences disintegration – disorder.

When Jesus says ‘What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?’ (Mark 8:36) we often think he is talking about going to hell – but he is referring to a symptom rather than a destination. What good is it for someone to have success, money, power or whatever, if in the process their soul dies?

We are not our soul – the soul is one part of our personality, whose job it is to integrate will, mind, and body. It is the deepest part of you and it is not under your direct control – it runs you (you do not run it) so if it’s broken your life will not hang together – the relationships that make you (with others, with God, with creation and with yourself) will not make a coherent whole.

To quote Dallas Willard again:

“Do you mean,” some will say, “that the individual and collective disasters that fill the human scene are not imposed upon us from without? That they do not just happen to us?” Yes. That is what I mean. In today’s world, famine, war, and epidemic are almost totally the outcome of human choices, which are expressions of the human spirit. Though various qualifications and explanations are appropriate, that is in general true. Individual disasters, too, very largely follow upon human choices, our own or those of others. And whether or not they do in a particular case, the situations in which we find ourselves are never as important as our responses to them, which come from our “spiritual” side. A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations before which others stand like helpless children saying “Why?”

The Bible is full of wisdom on these matters. That is why we call major books of the Old Testament “wisdom literature.” Jesus sums it all up in his teachings. He is the power and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). For example, he tells us, “Seek first the kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all else shall be provided to you” (Matthew 6:33, par). And “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house upon rock. The rain fell and the streams rose and the winds blew and beat upon the house. But it did not collapse, for it was built on rock” (Matthew 7:24-25, par).

Accordingly, the greatest need you and I have—the greatest need of collective humanity—is renovation of our heart. That spiritual place within us from which outlook, choices, and actions come has been formed by a world away from God. Now it must be transformed.

John Ortberg writes, “Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart.”

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Here Jesus is referencing will, mind and body along with soul.

How can we attain an ordered heart?

Col 3:2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Our lives are hidden – a mystery. But a combination of Jesus' teachings and practices, the deep wisdom of the word of God and the practices of centuries of followers who have tried this over the years gives us a whole range of practices that can help us work with the Holy Spirit in the renewing of our hearts and minds and the healing of our souls.

It is a work that will be completed when we die, but something I want to get on with now, because of the deep rewards it brings

- in terms of being able to function as I want to not driven by my brokenness
- in terms of the very real joy in learning to rest in God (living by the spirit and not working out of the flesh)
- in terms of the blessing I can bring to others if I had a soul that was ordered and not disordered.

What must I do to become/remain spiritually healthy?

When John Ortberg had just got a big ministry job and was very busy he gave Dallas Willard a call and asked him this question, and DW replied: 'You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.'

Where do I start?

V – I – M – get a **vision** first for what an ordered heart looks like, then form the **intention** and begin to engage with the various **means** of renewing your soul:

Church – a community of people, centred around worshipping God together, encouraging each other and reaching out to others (the lost or the poor – something easier as part of a team). This is the biggest single thing that will help – especially as a first step. It's a commitment that requires prioritising above all others and it costs. If you want to make progress in your life get stuck in – Sundays and small group, serve on team, give, invite friends along.

Worship, prayer (again easier as part of a team), Bible study (BIOY, small group, books, apps, Youtube)

Spiritual exercises – sabbath, solitude, fasting, celebration, meditation...

How do you move from the 10 minutes in a morning and then zilch (and why do you need to?)

Examen

Lectio Divina

Contemplative walks

Imaginative scripture reading

Soaking