

THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 1: WHOLENESS

3 John 1:2, 2 Timothy 2:22-26 (NASB)

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The 1993 Steven Spielberg film *Jurassic Park* was a *tour de force* of moviemaking magic. At that time computer graphics were in their infancy, but using the tools of the time Spielberg made a convincing presentation of the restoration of dinosaurs to the earth on a small island off the coast of South America. In a common trick of moviemaking Spielberg weds our wonder at seeing such great images of dinosaurs with the wonder of the characters on the screen as they see—in the story—real dinosaurs face to face. The film takes great pains to establish the overwhelming, gut-level fascination of the scientists and others as they first see the recreated extinct animals and plants. There is the typical Hollywood music signaling us that something wondrous is occurring. The visitors startle again and again as Jurassic-era dinosaurs come into view. At one point the male paleontologist drops to his knees in awe. It is obviously a religious experience.

That is precisely what would happen to us if we were able to go back in time and visit the Garden of Eden, but for incomparably more significant reasons. The final verse describing the perfection of the Garden tips us off that things were very different there: "**And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed**" (Genesis 2:25). There is nothing in our experience to which we can relate those words. Adam and Eve were perfectly integrated, holy souls. Before the fall the body did not war against the spirit or the spirit against the soul. And this perfect inward peace was matched by perfect outward peace. There was no conflict between the first people and the plant or animal worlds. Most important, Adam and Eve were in perfect harmony with their Maker and Friend. If we were to visit our two original parents, we, too, would be struck with awe at the wholeness which integrated every part of their being. Our wonder at seeing such people would dwarf our fascination with even the most awesome dinosaurs.

Then, when mankind chose to sin, all that was fractured. Soul, mind, spirit, and heart were split apart and are now at war within every person. We battle with plants and animals. We fight with each other. Worst, we are mobilized against God in our fallen condition. But from the moment of the fall the plan of God went into action to bring redemption and restoration to our lives. The terms of that redemption and restoration have progressed through time, but the plan has always focused on atonement for sins provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter described the consummation of this process: "**But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells**" (2 Peter 3:13). All of history is moving toward wholeness by the hand of God.

HEALTH FOR THE SOUL

I am thankful beyond words that, while we are all waiting for the heavens and earth to be restored, it is possible for the servants of Jesus Christ to be healthy souls. We can live, if we are willing, in a condition of inward harmony of mind, soul, and spirit even as our bodies are headed to the grave. We can live in harmony with our God. John the Apostle prayed that this would come to pass for his brothers and sisters in Christ as he explained in his third letter: "**Beloved, I pray that in all respects**

you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1:2). He was making a comparison between the overall health and well-being of believers and the prospering of their souls. Although he does not repeat the word "healthy" in the second part of the sentence, the comparison demands that they be parallel. The Apostle John assumed that redemption in Christ brings restoration to the inward part of a person who then possesses a healthy, prospering soul. He prays for his brothers and sisters to be healthy and prospering in every area of life, just as is true of their souls.

What does it mean to have a healthy soul? The term "soul" means our inward nature generally, and more specifically "the seat of the will, desires, and affections" according to the Abbott-Smith Greek lexicon. It can also mean "breath" or simply "life." The fracturing of the soul caused by sin can, in fact, be repaired in Christ. We are destined, eventually, to become unified beings as we once were at the very beginning: happy, healthy, and holy. The Apostle John clearly believed that this process of restoration was supposed to begin in this life.

If you do a word study on Bible words which are used to describe the inward self such as heart, mind, soul, and spirit, you will discover that while they seem to be distinct in some ways, they overlap a great deal and are used interchangeably in places. Modern fractured people are accustomed to speaking of the emotional or psychological nature as if it can be treated separately from the spirit or mind of a person. In fact, we were created as unified beings. We are called to love God in that way: **"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH"** (Mark 12:30, caps original). When the redeemed get to heaven we will have all parts of our persons restored to their original integrity.

That means that there are few separate passages in Scripture on emotional health apart from spiritual health, yet that does not mean it is not important to God. Once we see that God's words to us about emotional and psychological health are bound together with the spiritual we can look at many passages and learn. We will gain the ability to overcome the many ways in which the modern, fractured way of looking at the meaning of personhood has caused us to affirm bizarre combinations of spiritual health and emotional dysfunction in the same people. In short, we will see that emotional maturity is a crucial part of a fully-formed Christian.

OUTLINE OF INWARD HEALTH

By contrast, how many times have you encountered people of great commitment to the church with whom you cannot discuss anything without arguing or getting insulted? People who give sacrificially yet have hard hearts in many ways? People who know Scripture very well but often refuse to associate with other Christians? A look at the integrated idea of inward health will help us get a handle on these kinds of problems. A familiar passage in 2 Timothy contains some of the Apostle Paul's last words of instruction to his protégé Timothy. While these were written to an ordained pastor, they give all of us a target to shoot for in having healthy souls. This will also be a test or example passage for us to see just how much God's word has to say about emotional health. Paul wrote: **"Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God**

may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:22-26).

First, the healthy soul flees "**youthful lusts.**" In today's world this is sometimes called "drama." When I studied with the C. S. Lewis Summer Institute at Oxford University in 2002 I had a room at Saint Catherine's College. The rooms all faced west to catch the sun, which was great for the other three seasons but unbearable in summer. The windows had to be open all night. Unfortunately, there were also many high school students on summer programs staying there who gathered in the quad like a flock of sheep. They screamed and carried on most of the night, every night. It was teen age drama to the hilt--who was kissing whom, who was touching whom, and hundreds of people had to listen to it. There was crying, running, banging of doors, and loud arguments--one in my stairwell. It was misery for all. The healthy soul runs from the corrosive, self-centered desires which produce that kind of drama.

The youthful passions also tempt us to try to cover the brokenness in our souls with blasts of self-gratification by abusing otherwise good things like sex, drugs, money, cars, or vacations. Any good thing God has given us is in danger of being abused in the hunt for relief for our inner selves. The Lord will heal our souls if we let him, but we must stop running after fake medicines.

Second, the healthy soul "**pursue[s] righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**" Implicit in this advice is a 180-degree change in direction in our lives. We stop running after youthful lusts and start running after the deep things which will bring health to our souls. No one slides accidentally into spiritual health and emotional maturity.

This pursuit has righteousness, faith, love, and peace as its goal. Those are not the goals of the average person I know. Have you heard people talking about these things in the course of normal life? It takes an act of great faith to direct the energies of your inward nature toward the things of lasting spiritual value. Do you think people who have taken their very source of meaning in life from having the biggest house or fastest car feel deep satisfaction on the day they die? Not likely. But here is the thought of the man or woman with a healthy soul on the day of death: "I have tasted righteousness, faith, love, and peace in my life. To God be the glory!"

This pursuit is not solitary, but done "**with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**" Human beings were created for community, and healthy souls are forged in community. In specific, the pursuits of the soul are consummated in a community of those seeking the same things, and with pure hearts. If you are seeking a healthy soul you will not care much about the color of the church carpet, how votes come out at the annual meeting, or what style songs are sung in worship. The healthy soul interacts with others without personal agendas. Often those with unhealthy souls will threaten to break community if they do not get what they want. Hidden agendas are evidence of a divided heart. James says of such a person: "**For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord...**" (James 1:7). If we want the God-stuff we must abandon all self-seeking and work together.

Thirdly, the healthy soul puts personal opinions in their proper place. Paul wrote: "**But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels**" (2 Timothy 2:23). Not all opinions are about foolish and ignorant things, but many are. Years ago in a previous pastorate I had a woman who kept approaching the elders with her opinions about how things should be done in the

church. Some of these were good but many seemed to be simply about her getting things that she wanted. After a long process of consideration the elders made a decision about a certain church policy which did not please her. She tolerated it for a while but eventually was harrying the elders to change it. Finally, in front of the whole elder board I asked her: Do you have any Scriptures to support your point of view? She paused, blinked, and then admitted: No. It was a monstrous waste of time for leaders who needed to be discipling the body of Christ and reaching out to the community. And the woman's frustration hardened into a long-term bitterness that she could not make the elders do what she wanted them to do. By contrast, the healthy soul is not always asserting private opinions. Because of this such people are easy to be with. Are you easy to be with?

Fourth, the healthy soul is comfortable with servanthood: "**The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome...**" (2 Timothy 2:24a). Because the soul is at peace in the Lord, it has no need to stand out, be first, or selfishly hoard personal resources while others are in need. This is a tremendous test of character. One might even say that the entire class system of human society is a product of emotional dysfunction, as evidenced by the pecking order in every company, school, or government agency. Healthy souls do not feel the need to peck! They are freed to serve others in the joy of their master.

Fifth, the healthy soul is kind and patient: "**...Be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged...**" (2 Timothy 2:24b). Kindness and patience assume that our own souls have a source of satisfaction which does not need to be drawn from others. It comes from the Lord. So when the annoying person, the disturbing person, the lying person, the cheater, and the moocher touch our lives we are able to respond with a kind word, an act of service, and the thought: *There but for the grace of God go I.*

Sixth, the healthy soul is "**able to teach...**" On the one hand, this is obviously a reference to Timothy's role as pastor and elder. On the other hand, the willingness to invest in others by teaching them is a great indicator of inward health. Some people are very skilled and successful in an area yet have no heart to pass the richness to others. That's sad! Not all have the spiritual gift of teaching, but we all have a call from God to invest his love, grace, and wisdom in others. Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica on behalf of himself, Silvanus, and Timothy, and said: "**...We were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives...**" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Seventh, the healthy soul speaks truth with love in the face of anger, hatred, and even demonic opposition, as Paul continued to say in our main passage in 2 Timothy: "**...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will**" (2 Timothy 2:25-26). The goal of the healthy soul is the good of others, and so it has hope for God's help for all people. The world is a mess and so are the people in it. We desperately need those who can take a punch, stand back up, and gently speak God's wisdom into the brokenness which we all share. Few things speak more powerfully about the reality of God in our lives than that!

Peter Scazzero, in a book entitled *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, summarized some of the principles of a healthy soul this way: "I break free to live in the truth. I stop pretending to myself, to others, and to God about what is truly taking place inside me....I break free from the illusion that there is

something richer, more beautiful, than the gift of loving and being loved" (Nashville: Nelson, 2006, pp. 58-59).

Have you broken free from the illusion that there is something better than righteousness, faith, love, and peace in the Lord? Your inward health depends upon making that break. Few people around you will have done so. Don't let that worry you. Your fractured inner self cannot be restored by any person or group, it must be healed by Christ himself.

It all starts with an honest release of all pretense between yourself and the God who made you. Do not trust your own wisdom in this matter. Ask the Lord to show you who you are. You are his child, made to live in a love relationship with himself, and you have gone away and become fractured. You know the reality of this fracturing in your own soul. And if you are honest, you admit that every attempt you have made to fix it yourself has ultimately failed. To every person the Lord speaks: "Let me heal your soul, my son, my daughter. Come to me, you who are weary and weighed down with cares, and you will find rest for your souls."

The healing begins with confession of your sins to God, reception of the atonement of Christ for your sins, and the in-flooding of eternal life. Why remain broken when the path to wholeness is open? The wonder of meeting dinosaurs or even Adam and Eve face to face could not compare with the experience of God knitting your inner self back together again.

[composite clip from *Jurassic Park* displaying wonder scenes, 2 min.]