

January 22, 2023

# Who Are You Really?

## OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S STUDY

If I asked you to explain what a “soul” is, what would you say? It is a word that we throw around a lot in Christian circles, but most of us would struggle to give a clear definition of the word “soul.” In this week’s lesson we are going to explore this very important biblical idea of your soul. And we are also going to discover that having a healthy soul means having a healthy sense of who we are in Christ.

## GET READY

- In the book *Your ONE Life* read chapters 6-10 on “Life’s Operating System: A Healthy Soul”
- When you hear the word “soul”, what comes to mind?
- Read Matthew 3:17 and Romans 8:15-17
- How would you answer the identity question “Who are you?”

## START HERE

Your life is a lot like an iceberg. The part of your life that sits above the waterline is the “doing”, external, visible part of your life. It is there for everyone to see. But a massive part of your life is underneath the waterline. It is the “being”, internal, invisible part of your life. It is your soul.

### Discussion Question

The word “soul” is a word that we throw around a lot in Christian circles. If you were asked what a soul is, what would you say?

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Another analogy that might be helpful is to think of an auditorium that has a frontstage and a backstage. We all have a frontstage life and a backstage life. Front stage is our public, external world. It’s where we’re noticed, where the spotlight is on us, where people applaud and affirm us. On the front stage everything is orderly and neatly in its place. Frontstage is all about *doing*. For most of us, how we live on the frontstage (our actions) is where we find our sense of identity and worth.

But we also have a backstage life, and the two are connected. If we neglect the backstage, eventually the frontstage will fall apart. While the frontstage is our public world, the backstage is our private

world. The backstage is not only private but is also dark and usually messy. The audience isn't allowed there. Backstage has no spotlight and no glory. What happens backstage facilitates and what takes place on the frontstage. Backstage is all about being. It is the place of the soul.

We are very comfortable with frontstage conversations. We can easily engage conversations about weather, sports, economy, politics, careers and family. But backstage conversations are more uncomfortable.

When John Wesley started small groups, they had a set of questions they talked through weekly. The first question they asked each other every week was "How is it with your soul?" Most Christians would struggle to answer such a question. Most of us don't have conversations about what is going on inside of us at the level of our emotions and soul.

It is helpful for us to be reminded that our soul is the unseen, eternal, essence of our existence. Your soul is the "real" you. As Dallas Willard has said "Your soul is not just something that lives on after your body dies. It's the most important thing about you. It is your life."

Genesis 2:7 (NIV) says, *Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* The Hebrew word for "being" is literally the word soul. God created man's body, but it wasn't until God breathed life into him that he became a living soul.

The Bible describes your body as the container for your soul. Someday your body is going to wear out and die, but that is not the end of you. The Bible is clear that the real you (your soul) continues to live on after your body has died.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NLT) says, *For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.*

Again, Dallas Willard says, "You are not just a self; you are a soul. You're a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God, which means you were not made to be self-sufficient."

### Discussion Question

What do you think Dallas Willard means when he says, "you are not just a self; you are a soul?"

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On your smartphone you have a bunch of apps which are the programs you have chosen to use. But running in the background on your phone is an operating system. You can't see it, but it allows all of the apps to function and work. Your soul is like the operating system of your life. And when we are living from a healthy soul that loves Jesus and is living for kingdom priorities, life is incredibly fulfilling.

## GO DEEPER

It is not enough to know you have a soul. We must learn how to pay attention to our soul and heart. Jesus often criticized the pharisees for only focusing on externals and neglecting matters of the heart and soul.

For most of us, when we got saved, our church's attempt to disciple us was mostly about the externals. It is fair to describe many churches discipleship programs as mostly "behavior modification." Stop saying certain words. Start reading your Bible. Stop going certain places. Start volunteering in the church. Stop chasing materialism. Start tithing. We learn how to "do" the right things and stop "doing" the wrong things.

### Discussion Question

What is the problem with an approach to discipleship that only focuses on "doing" (externals)?

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And while there is an external (doing) part of our discipleship, what doesn't get much airtime is the transformation that needs to happen in our inner life (being). We don't talk much about emotions or what might be driving our lives under the surface of our actions. But if we are going to become mature followers of Jesus, we have to address some of the backstage (soul) issues that can keep us unhealthy.

One of those issues that is critical for a healthy soul is the issue of your identity.

In the movie *Avatar*, Marine Jake Sully is a paraplegic whose military assignment is to gather intel by using an "avatar" identity. Even though his body was broken, the avatar he lived through virtually was strong, powerful and whole. The avatar everyone saw was radically different than the Jake Sully no one saw. Many of us in the church feel the need to assume an "avatar" identity.

The truth is that none of us are exactly what we appear to be. We all carry around a backpack full of stuff that we keep hidden from others. Past secrets, old wounds, destructive self-talk, secret addictions, emotional struggles, and angry attitudes. Most of us learn how to function in spite of these things. We project a well-adjusted, happy-go-lucky, confident, normal exterior... because that's what is expected of us. That's what good Christians "do".

But often it isn't the real us. It is a false self. And, what we project for people to see isn't what we are feeling and experiencing inside. As they say in Texas, we can be a "hot mess". We hear about the abundant life that Christ wants us to have... and we want that to be our experience. But, the voices from our past keep us defeated. Voices of shame, guilt, condemnation, anxiety, doubt, fear, and worthlessness.

But God wants to change all of that. In the Old Testament, on special occasions, people would speak a blessing into someone else's life. They were words of encouragement, hope, faith, and affirmation. The blessing was a way of saying "This is what I see in you." Or "Here is how I see God working in you and through you".

At the baptism of Jesus, God speaks a blessing out of heaven. Matthew 3:17 (NIV) says, *And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Even Jesus needed his Father's blessing and affirmation.

## LIVE IT OUT

This week, commit to being a person who speaks words of blessing into the lives of others. Right now, identify at least one person that you will encourage this coming week.

May today's lesson be words of blessing into your life and may you forever settle exactly what God thinks of you. Some of us have never had the blessing of our earthly father, and we need the blessing of our heavenly Father.

## Discussion Questions

When you were growing up, did you feel like you had your parents "blessing"? What words or phrases did you hear a lot growing up?

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You may have never felt good enough. You may feel like you were a disappointment. You have lived with unanswered questions your whole life... "why was I abandoned?" "why didn't they want me?" For some, you felt like you had to earn your parents love and approval. And for some of you, it's been years since you lived at home, but those feelings are still raw. Certainly, some of us grew up in homes where love and blessing was spoken to us regularly. If that describes you, you are indeed blessed.

Even though God says, "the moment you receive Christ, you are a new person," it is not always easy to believe and feel that truth.

We still live in a sinful world, and we still have our flesh which is very capable of sin and wrong thinking. We have an enemy, called the devil, who would love to keep us defeated. And, we have all been deeply marked by our past.

One reason the blessing is so important is that many, if not most of us, don't see ourselves as God sees us. We carry around distorted views of ourselves and as a result, our souls are unhealthy.

It's like the funny mirrors at the circus. They distort reality. As we gaze into the mirror, we indeed see ourselves, but we don't see accurately.

Even though God has come to set us free from old patterns of behavior and old ways of thinking, we still see the old us. We still hear the voices of our past telling us what we were rather than listening to God as he tells us what we are.

One of the greatest chapters in all the Bible is Romans 8. In chapter 7 Paul has described this great battle that rages inside of him. As a believer, you want to do right. You want to follow God. Yet, you find yourself still struggling with old sin patterns. In fact, near the very end of chapter 7, Paul blurts out, "O wretched man that I am."

If we are honest, each of us can fully relate to Paul's words. Even as a Christian trying to live for God's purposes, there is still a struggle. Many biblical scholars believe Paul is not writing about his condition prior to knowing Christ and he is not talking about a time in his life when as a Christian he had strayed. NO! He is writing as a mature Christian who is sensitized to the struggle of sin in his own heart.

Those of us who have walked with Jesus a long time can relate to Paul's struggle. We can still struggle with misdirected motives and selfishness. We can posture and manipulate a conversation to put ourselves in a good light. Our words can be vicious. Our anger can spark easily, and we can lash out at the people we love the most.

The next chapter in Romans makes a dramatic shift. In chapter 8 Paul describes the victory we can have in Christ. We don't have to live a life of defeat and bondage to our past. We really can experience power over sin and the flesh. There is a phrase in Romans 8 that is the key that unlocks the chains of spiritual bondage. It is a phrase about our spiritual identity. It is the phrase "in Christ".

Chapter 8 of Romans begins "in Christ" (v.1) and ends "in Christ" (v.39). There is no condemnation in Christ, and nothing can separate us from the love that is in Christ.

Your spiritual address is "In Christ"

That little phrase "in Christ" is the treasury of your identity and value. It is found 130 times in the New Testament.

So, what puts you "in Christ"? Entering a personal relationship with him. Once you become a Christian, you are "in Christ" and God now sees you differently, because he sees you "in Christ". In Romans 8 we discover many facets of this new identity, but we want to look at 4 markers of your new identity.

## 4 Markers of Your New Identity

Romans 8:15-17 (NIV) says, *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" The Spirit himself testi-*

*fies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

That is what God thinks of you. But some of us are like Lazarus in the New Testament. Jesus had a good friend named Lazarus who died suddenly. The Bible says Jesus went to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried and ordered that the stone in front of the tomb be rolled back. He looked up toward heaven, prayed to his heavenly Father, and then in a loud voice cried "Lazarus, come out". Verse 44 of John 11 says that Lazarus came out, but he was still wrapped in his grave clothes.

This is a vivid picture of many Christians. Spiritually speaking, they have been brought to life, but they are still hindered and restricted by their old life. The life of God is in them, but they need to be set free.

### ***1. We are no longer slaves. We are sons and daughters. (v.15)***

*"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship"*

You are in the family. Your worth is not based on what you know or own, but who knows you and owns you. Beginning to truly believe this helps you live from a healthy soul.

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT) says, *"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure."*

There is a huge difference between a slave and a son. Our children have privileges of safety, security, provision, acceptance, guidance, support, and love. Those are automatic because they are our kids.

Our kids don't have to try to get us to like them (at least most of the time) or manipulate us to love them. Many of us know that we are saved by grace, but we have spent our entire Christian lives trying to get God to love us.

You are God's child. Let that sink in. You are unconditionally loved and accepted. That is your forever identity.

The second marker of our identity is this.

### ***2. We no longer see God as distant, but we see him as daddy. (v.15b)***

*"And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

The word "abba" is an Aramaic word which is an intimate familiar term for father. The English word "daddy" probably best captures the spirit of the word "abba."

## Discussion Question

Do you struggle to think of God in such a familiar term as “daddy”?

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The notion of calling God your father is not big news to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, this would have been front page news to every Jew in the first century. They thought of God in many ways, but “daddy” would not have been one of them.

In the Old Testament, only the high priest ever went directly into the presence of God. And, he only went once a year, on the day of Atonement. They held the holiness and name of God in such reverence, that they wouldn’t even say the word YHWH. It was too holy to even pronounce out loud.

For those of us who grew up with a view of God that is stern and detached, it can feel irreverent to view God as “daddy.” But it’s not... it is simply an indicator of the kind of intimate relationship God wants with us.

As our heavenly Father, he sees you as forgiven and perfectly redeemed. And he loves you unconditionally. For some of us, we have been searching our entire lives for a father who would love us just as we are.

This intimacy we enjoy with God is also underscored by the fact that he calls us his friends. He not only loves you, he likes you and calls you his friend. In John 15:15 (NLT) Jesus says, *“I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn’t confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.”*

### **3. We are no longer confused, but we are confident in our spiritual identity. (v.16)**

*“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children”*

Even though this battle rages in our soul between right and wrong, and even though we still struggle with sin, once we are “in Christ”, we are the children of God. And, the Spirit of God whispers to our spirit and confirms that we belong to the family. Our sonship (and daughtership) does not depend on how good we are or how little we sin; it depends on whether or not we are “in Christ”.

But sometimes we forget, and we need to be reminded that we are in the family.

In Scripture there are something like 36 different things that happened to you when you made the choice to follow Christ. You were justified, made a new creation, made spiritually alive, made holy, called a saint, forgiven, made at peace with God, reconciled, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, adopted, made co-heirs with Christ, and given eternal life. And that is just the beginning.

For some of us, the biggest step toward living from a healthy soul is to start listening to the voice of God’s Spirit telling us that we are loved, and we are family.

## LIVE IT OUT

Do a search on the internet or in a Bible program for Bible verses about your identity in Christ. Then, write out 3 of those verses on 3x5 cards and review those 3 verses every day for the next week.

Whether or not you are a child of God does not depend on how you feel. It depends on God.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NLT) says, *And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit...The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people.*

The Greek word for “guarantee” is *arabon* and was also the word used for an engagement ring. The *arabon* indicated that you were spoken for and had entered into a covenant relationship with someone. The Holy Spirit is God's engagement ring letting you know of His commitment to you and love for you.

### **4. We are no longer spiritually poor, but now we are rich. (v.17)**

*And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.*

Paul ends Romans 7 with the statement “O wretched man that I am”. And just 17 verses later he says we are co-heirs with Christ to all that God has. We share in his spiritual wealth and treasures.

Ephesians 1:3 says, *How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.*

Let that sink in. You can't fully understand how rich you are in Christ until you understand how wretched you are in yourself. The light of grace shines brightest against the backdrop of my own darkness.

## Discussion Question

What are some of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ?

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As we wrap up this lesson, let's go back to where we started. You have a soul. It's the “real” you. It is your invisible, internal world. And part of having a healthy soul means understanding and believing that your core identity is that you are a child of God. You are “in Christ” and nothing can ever change that. May the words of Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV) ring in your ears this week.

***“The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”***