

Loving God in the Real World (Part 3)
Healing for the Ruined Soul
Jeremiah 6:16-19
(GCF – September 20, 2009)

I. Introduction

[Testimony from last week's passage? Galatians 5:22-25]

Scripture for this week – Hosea 14:1-7

Why Parents Are Crazy!!!

A father passing by his son's bedroom was astonished to see that his bed was nicely made and everything was picked up. Then he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow that was addressed to 'Dad.' With the worst premonition he opened the envelope with trembling hands and read the letter.

Dear Dad:

*It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I have been finding real passion with Stacy and she is so nice. But I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercing, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it's not only the passion...Dad she's pregnant. Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone. We'll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people that live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy. In the meantime we will pray that science will find a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it. Don't worry Dad. I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure that we will be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren.
Love, Your Son John*

PS. Dad, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than a report card that's in my center desk drawer. I love you. Call me when it's safe to come home.

Upon returning from my sabbatical, I shared with you that our vision to passionately love God, intentionally reach out to others, draw people into a loving fellowship, and strategically equip them for joyful service has not changed.

But I have become aware of our need to simplify that statement even more than we did when we came up with the statement “Grace Christian Fellowship exists to help people reach out through worship, friendship, and service.”

In our monthly leaders meeting (which you are all invited to), I am proposing an even simpler statement: Love God, Love People, Serve Others.

Now this may be modified a little, but the basic threefold idea will be there. It is simple, it is clear and it not only addresses our mission as a church, but also addresses how we will accomplish the mission (more on that after we have worked through the process further).

Say it with me: Love God, love people, serve others.

It is in light of this idea that my last two messages have looked at what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus said, *“The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. 30 And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ 31 The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”* (Mark 12:28-31, NLT)

In my first message about loving God, I spoke about loving God with all your heart. If you missed it you can go to our web site at www.gcfportland.org and listen to it.

Last week, I began to talk about loving God with all your soul and essentially stated how critical this is our relationship with God and others.

I spent most of the time talking about how we come to Christ with a ruined soul; and even though we have been “born again” (we have a new heart) and sincerely want to follow Jesus we still find our lives filled with all kinds of contradictions to what we understand the Scriptures teach us. There is this shocking discovery that our lives are still messed up in many ways.

Now most people do one of two things when they realize this. They either give up trying to follow Jesus altogether, believing that there must not be anything to this Jesus stuff; or they learn to put on a good Christian front even though their inner lives and relationships with others are still in turmoil.

But there is a third option, and that is to learn how to love God with all your soul – to engage in the lifelong process of “working out your salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

This third option is what the growing process is all about. It is allowing God into every arena of your life and allowing Him to bring healing and restoration to your soul.

You may feel like there is still a lot of hurt, bitterness, addictions, etc. in your life, but there is hope and that hope lies in learning to love God with all your soul - bringing every area of pain, loss, and struggle to God and allowing Him to bring healing to your life.

If you missed the message last week, I encourage you to listen to it online.

Remember what Jesus said? *“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find **rest for your souls**. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT)

II. Healing for the ruined soul

A. What does the soul at rest look like?

“Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. 2 Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. 3 O Israel, put your hope in the Lord—now and always.” (Psalm 131, NLT)

“But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard — things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. Legalism is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good — crucified. Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.” (Galatians 5:22-25, The Message)

B. How are we to find rest for our soul? How do we love God with all our soul?

1. Take **Responsibility** for the State of your Soul

To begin this journey towards the healing of the soul we must start by taking responsibility for its condition.

*“This is what the Lord says: ‘Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, **and walk in it.** Travel its path, and **you will find rest for your souls.** But you reply, ‘No, that's not the road we want!’ 17 I posted watchmen over you who said, ‘Listen for the sound of the alarm.’ But you replied, ‘No! We won't pay attention!’ 18 Therefore, listen to this, all you nations. Take note of my people's situation. 19 Listen, all the earth! I will bring disaster on my people. It is the fruit of their own schemes, because they refuse to listen to me. They have rejected my word.” (Jeremiah 6:16-19, NLT)*

We must stop blaming our circumstances (as horrible as they may have been or may still be).

We need to stop living in denial as if nothing is wrong, and we need to acknowledge that we have not fully surrendered ourselves to God in many areas of our lives.

We are asked by God (often through the words of others or even our circumstances) to walk in the old, godly way, but we say, “That’s not the road I want.”

Or we hear the sound of the alarm: “Stop doing that” or “This is what you should do!” But we say, “No! We won’t pay attention!”

No matter that we attend church – the reality is we refuse to listen to God and we reject His word in light of our actions.

We need to take responsibility for our lives (our souls – the way we think, the way we feel, and the choices we make) and turn to the Lord.

2. Repent

“Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. 2 In just a short time he will restore us, so that we may live in his presence.” (Hosea 6:1-2, NLT)

To repent is to turn away from all those things we have done in our attempt to find meaning in life. It is turning away from all of our false gods that have only given us ruined souls.

Repentance begins with remorse for the things we have done.

Why is this important? Because genuine remorse tells us a great deal about someone. In the court systems remorse matters greatly. A person who can harm someone else and show no remorse is not going to change.

There is little hope for genuine change (healing for the ruined soul) in one who is without remorse. It begins with the understanding of *“Woe is me! For I am undone”* (Isaiah 6:5, KJV).

It does not begin with, “I have been hurt, I have been wounded, or I have suffered and am broken.” Woe is **me!**

Dallas Willard writes, *“Without this realization of our utter ruin and the genuine revisioning and redirecting of our lives, which that bitter realization naturally gives rise to, no clear path to inner transformation can be found.* It is psychologically and spiritually impossible. We will steadfastly remain on the throne of our universe...perhaps trying to ‘use a little God’ here and there.” (*Renovation of the Heart*, page 60)

“For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10, NLT)

3. Apply the Cross to Your Life

It is amazing to me how we try to preserve our ruined souls! We hold on to our hurt, our rage and our addictions, even though they are destroying our lives.

But what does Jesus say?

“If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?” (Mark 8:35-36, NLT)

Even as we grow in our understanding that we need to change, our tendency is to try to bring that change about ourselves. I'll do better next time. Tomorrow I won't do it. We try to dress up this stinking carcass of our soul, but under the outer veneer of goodness there is still this horrible smell!

The Message translates Mark 8:35-36 this way: "*Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self.*"

The only way to bring healing to our ruined soul is to completely let go of it – to put it to death, in a manner of speaking.

Listen again to Jesus, "*Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.'*" (Matthew 16:24, NLT)

This is not a one-time experience, but a way of life. Paul said, "*I die daily.*" (1 Corinthians 15:51)

"Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. 5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world." (Colossians 3:2-6, NLT)

This may sound kind of morbid, but think of this way (and Jesus tells us a similar story). If you discovered that there was *millions* of dollars worth of gold under a large piece of land and you had the opportunity to purchase the land and the rights to the gold for half a million dollars. Wouldn't you do whatever you could to buy that land?

This is how it is with God. We surrender our dying ruined soul and in exchange we receive a living eternal one!

4. **Submit** to the Word of God

The Scriptures are one of the greatest gifts of grace that God has ever given to humanity. They provide a picture of reality.

The law, the prophets, the Gospels and letters enable us to know God, how He interacts with His people, and how we are to live. In submitting to the Scriptures we discover where our true well-being lies.

Listen to Psalm 19: "*The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. 9 Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair.*"

10 They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. 11 They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.” (Versus 7-11, NLT)

C. Application

In closing, let me share God’s promise with you.

“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for your sins have brought you down. 2 Bring your confessions, and return to the Lord. Say to him, ‘Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you our praises. 3 Assyria cannot save us, nor can our war-horses. Never again will we say to the idols we have made, ‘You are our gods.’ No, in you alone do the orphans find mercy.’ 4 The Lord says, ‘Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever. 5 I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. Israel will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon. 6 Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon. 7 My people will again live under my shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon.” (Hosea 14:1-7, NLT)