

## “What If My Soul Shifted?”

*Soul Shift – part #1. Based on the book by Steve DeNeff and David Drury*

*Matthew 16:24-26*

[63] (Welcome, prayer, etc.)

[64] When the kids were little, we’d play a game in the car. Every time we drove past a cemetery, we’d hold our breath. Why? So our souls wouldn’t escape and go into the graveyard.

It seems silly now, but the idea of the soul leaving the body has deep cultural roots. When people sneeze, we immediately say something like, “Bless you” or “Gesundheit.” I suspect, but cannot verify, that this practice started in the days of the Black Plague, where people literally sneezed and then died. Souls have been important for a long time!

[65] So, what is the soul? How do we describe something we cannot see but we instinctively know exists? You hear the word all the time. Politicians talk about the “Soul of the Nation.” Coaches talk about the heart and soul of the team. We even have an expression, “Soul Food,” to describe the comfort food we crave that just makes us feel good, although it might not be the healthiest for us. (Jessica, if you’re watching, I’m thinking about a plate of greens and some corn bread right now...)

[66] My family and recently watched an animated movie from Disney called “Soul.” It was an imaginative tale of a jazz musician looking for his big break, but he has an accident that separates his soul from his body. While looking for his own body again, he helps another soul find their “spark” or purpose in life. The film’s success was based on the fact that many people living are still doing a lot of soul-searching.

No matter what you believe philosophically about the soul and the body, we can agree that our thoughts, motivations, passions, feelings and choices have a source. You can call it your soul, your mind, your being, or your conscience. Whatever its name, it is the place where the real “you” lives.

[67] In our scripture passage today, Jesus is having a tough discussion with his disciples about their souls. Allow me to read that passage again.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

Jesus knew the most important part of a person was their soul. Elsewhere in Matthew 8 and 15, Jesus said the soul was more important than your hands or your eyes, and if anything jeopardized the eternal health of your soul, you would be better off without it. When teaching his disciples, Jesus told them that anyone trying by themselves to save their life – their eternal soul – would lose it. Yet if they “lost” their life – in other words, turned over everything to Christ, including their possessions and selfish desires, and fully loved Jesus and served others – then they would find their soul, their spark, their eternal life.

Friends, your soul is eternal. It is more valuable than anything else. Your soul is the real “you,” the deepest part of your being. It is so important, Jesus died to save it. Pastor Steve DeNeff tells us that the soul is where God wants to connect with you. And he explains further, the soul is also the fundamental place that God wants to change.

[68] We are fascinated with soul-searching and self-improvement. In western culture, especially the USA, we make resolutions all the time. Every January, the membership of fitness centers jumps, but only for a few weeks. We desire to change, but the problem is, we have a hard time making that change stick. Why is that? Bill Tancer notes, “We are a society that is increasingly fixated on instant gratification.” Yet, changing the soul cannot be done lightly or quickly.

[69] What do you want your soul to look like? If you tracked your attitudes, your words, your choices, I’m guessing sometimes you’d be really pleased, but a lot more often, like me, we’d find ourselves lacking. If we want our souls to change, we have to find a better way to make lasting change.

My brother’s family lives in southern California. They know all about seismic changes, literally, what an earthquake feels like. These massive forces work under the earth, creating mountains, valleys, lakes, oceans, and continents.

Sometimes we feel these movements immediately, what is called a seismic shift. Other times, we don't notice them, but they are there.

Change in our souls can be like that. It can happen in progressive small changes, or in a large dramatic change. God works in mysterious ways. Either way, though, the change eventually is noticeable.

[70] There is an old joke. How many psychologists does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but the lightbulb has to want to change. That is what is at the heart of this message. The burning question is, Do you want to change? Most of us say yes – we all recognize the desire to improve. If the desire is there, why don't we make these lasting changes?

The authors of the Soul Shift book note two reasons why these changes don't stick. First, we too often tap into the wrong source – ourselves. Second, we lack accountability. To make a lasting change, we need someone to help along the way.

[71] To make a shift, we have to understand the difference between Reformation and Transformation. Reformation “comes from an outside voice, begins with a series of actions, and expects immediate results.” Reformation is unlikely to cause a lasting change. But Transformation “comes from an inside voice, begins with a deep change in our souls, patiently waits for the results to show.” (p. 21)

That's the purpose of the Soul Shift. To make lasting changes in our congregation over the long term.

[72] You have a choice, of course. You can just sit and listen to the messages. You can read the book, watch the film, and after a few weeks, say, “That was nice.” Or you can embrace the material. You can really believe that God can change you. You can dig into the books and small groups, and allow others to have a deeper glimpse into your life as you look into theirs. And that is the best way to make a lasting change.

Many people in this church have participated in Emmaus and joined something called a “Fourth Day Group,” a regular gathering of people who read the Bible, pray, and ask each other important, deep questions. Those that have

had this experience know how powerful a small group ministry is. This is another opportunity.

The Soul Shift is organized into seven areas, seven shifts in thinking, being, and doing, seven specific targets where we all can help each other makes changes. I love how the authors put it: “What would it look like if we committed to even just three of these goals?” In other words, any change, if blessed by God, would be worth it.

[73] So what are we getting ourselves into? Here are the seven shifts the authors identify. (There could be hundreds more, but these are our focus.)

1. Me to You - from focusing on ourselves to focusing to others
2. Slave to Child - from serving God to loving God
3. Seen to Unseen - from things that are temporary to things that are eternal
4. Consumer to Steward – from acquiring things for ourselves to offering what we have to God and others.
5. Ask to Listen - from asking others to listening to God.
6. Sheep to Shepherd - from following the crowd to leading like Christ.
7. Me to We - from individualism to community.

At first glance, that might be overwhelming. Wow, Pastor, seven shifts? How I am going to do that? I want to share another quote from the authors: “Jesus didn’t die on the cross so that we could all have more guilt in our lives. He died so we might be free.” (p17.) The purpose of this series is not to place a burden on you, it is to set you free to live the life God really wants you to. What is the true condition of my soul? Once we answer that question, God can begin to work on it.

I also want to tell you my biggest fear. I fear we will mistake the program for the Messiah. Understand, soul shifting is only accomplished by our participation with the Holy Spirit. I think this program a good resource, but it is only a human-made resource. If you start thinking a book will change you, you better be talking about the Bible.

[74] So, how about it? Are you ready for a shift? Are you ready for a change? Romans 12 tells us that only by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice can

we God’s perfect will. Only by transformation will be finally fully live into the holy lives God created us for.

One thing I do know – the only way to experience transformation – a real shift in our souls – is to be open to Jesus. We cannot just read his words as good advice. We must actually understand them and apply them.

So join us. Read the book. Get into a small group. Watch the sermons by Pastor DeNeff. He does a much better job than I do! But most importantly, commit yourself in the next eight weeks to be open to God doing a dramatic change inside of you. Remember Mark 10:27 – “With God all things are possible.”

Let’s pray.

Memory Verse:

Psalms 51:10 (NIV) - “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

Reflection Questions:

1. How often do you try to change something about yourself? How successful is that attempt usually?
2. What causes people to change spiritually?
3. Who is someone you know who has changed and become more like Christ in a way you admire?
4. How would a Soul Shift change our entire congregation?
5. Are you willing to let God change your soul?