

Michael Hoisington: Good afternoon! We're talking about the soul. This isn't a presentation; this is a conversation, so that means you all need to be prepared to add to our conversation with your thoughts.

They asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment?" What did Jesus say? All your heart, all your mind, all your strength, and all your soul. That's why we need to be concerned about the soul.

So now I want to sing this song, which was written by a man who sent his wife and his four daughters from the U.S to England. On the way to England, there was a shipwreck. And the man got a telegram from his wife that said, "All are lost, except for me." All four of his daughters had died in the shipwreck. So immediately, the father got on the next ship going to England. And when they went over the spot where his four daughters had died, that's when he wrote this song giving testimony that despite what goes on in life, it is well with my soul. So let's sing this song now while thinking about this father going across and having enough love and faith in God to say, "It's well with my soul, even though my four daughters died."

So my question is ... *Is it well with your soul?* Can you say that? It is well with my soul. Let me pray to just begin this time. *Heavenly Father, we're so grateful for Your love and for the ways that You've created us. And Father, as we consider our souls, we pray that You would guide and direct us during this time. Help us to better understand our souls and how we can care for our own souls. And Father, how we can care for the souls around us. So we commit this time to You and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So before I have you start answering some questions, I want to look at some places in the Bible that talk about the soul. Most people in my country know more on operating a cellphone than they know how to care for their own soul. So let's just look at some passages in the Scripture that talk about soul. Souls need restoration. There's times when we need to go to God and have Him restore our souls.

In the book of Psalms, can you guess how many times the word soul is mentioned? Ninety-four times the word "soul" is used. And if you read the song and look at the word "soul", these are just some observations. The soul has knowledge. The soul can be saved. The soul experiences emotions. The soul can be talked to. The soul at times needs restoring. The soul is different from the body. And although distinct from the body, the soul can be killed.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only take care and keep your soul diligently." The instruction is that we need to take care of our soul diligently. If you're going to take care of something, better know what it is and how you care for it. So if we're going to care for our souls we have to know what are our souls and how do we care for them. This is now referring to leadership. "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls." Leaders have a responsibility to care for the souls of those they lead. But I also think that everybody has the responsibility to care for the souls above them, care for the souls of those who walk beside them, as well as those under them.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul? There's no profit for gaining the whole world if you lose your soul. The soul needs to be cared for. So, now you're going to join the conversation. I want you to talk to the people around you in a group of two or three, and I want you to tell each other what is the soul. What is the soul? And how do people that you know use the word "soul"? Now, after a few minutes, I'm going to ask you, or some of you, to tell us all what you've discussed. How do you understand what the soul is? And how do people around you when they talk about soul, what do you think their understanding is? So go ahead.

Now comes the time for you to share. So who will volunteer?

Participant: Can we separate spirit and soul? Because the Chinese words for soul combine with two characters. One is spirit and the other is soul. But these two characters together mean the soul. So the question is: Can we separate the spirit and the soul?

Michael Hoisington: “Yes!” Some more volunteers. Remember that this is a conversation.

Participant: In the Scripture, we have said that the soul means our life. It has personality, so the soul means our thoughts, our feelings, and our will. There’s three parts to the soul. In Isaiah 42:5. He’s the one that gives breath to our creation, and He’s the one that gives the spirit to walk on the land. He’s the first to give the breath and the spirit. So can we say that we can separate spirit, soul, and body? So my thinking is that the spirit represents our life with Christ. And the distinction between man and other animals, other life, is that we have the life of Christ. They don’t. So the animals have soul in the body, but for us we have spirit, soul, and the body. Those who don’t have Christ walk around with no spirit. That’s my thinking.

For the non-believers, their definition is Hell. When they go to Hell, does their spirit go to Hell? Or both the soul and the spirit?

Michael Hoisington: Yeah.

Participant: My question is: Our spirit, the origin of our spirit, is that breath that God breathed into Adam?

Michael Hoisington: It’s another theological reason.

Participant: Our discussion is that souls are alive. Sometimes when we use the term soul company, soul friendship, so that means the soul represents the very depth of our being: our emotions, our thinking, our feeling. In China, we have another saying, “Someone will betray his soul.” So in that sense, soul may represent our conscience.

Participant: According to [Inaudible 02:28:34-02:28:35] Chapter 5: Verse 23, Paul is now saying, “[Inaudible 02:28:43-02:28:45] completely.” [Inaudible 02:28:52-02:28:53]. According to the Bible, a human has three parts: spirit, soul, and body. When we come to the Lord we give our heart to Jesus. [Inaudible 02:29:21-02:29:23]. And what about soul? Soul is our personality, which is three parts: mind, emotion, and feeling. And also, our conscience is not in our soul. It’s in our spirit the way God creates it, man. God breathed into us and that’s why soul was creating. And every human has a conscience.

Michael Hoisington: One thing is that I’m not supposed to be the expert answering all these deep theological questions. This is supposed to be a conversation. And once again, just to bring our focus back, this is about soul care. So what is the soul?

Participant: Soul is a creation. It’s created by God, and it includes three parts, just like you said. Our feelings, our thinking, and the world. A soul’s life is in fellowship with God.

Michael Hoisington: Okay, I want to move on now because I want to get into how we can care for this thing we call our souls. Because what I found is that many people neglect their souls, and there's real problems when you neglect your soul. But I wanted to just start by talking about what is this soul. Read that. Does that make any sense to you?

Participant: This is a very good definition. So that means when a person dies, then all the activity stops.

Michael Hoisington: If your soul is healthy, no external circumstances can defeat you or destroy your life. We saw that in the song we sang. The father losing four daughters did not destroy his life because his soul was healthy, and he could say, "It's well with my soul". But on the other side, if your soul is unhealthy, then nothing outside of you can redeem your life. That's why it's so important that we look at our soul, we care for our soul, and make sure that it stays healthy. How long do you think it takes for the soul to become unhealthy? Yes, it does take very long.

People here, the way that their soul would become unhealthy would be by small increments. Erosion. And the biggest obstacle to a healthy soul is busyness. People too busy doing ministry are not paying attention to their soul, and over time the soul becomes unhealthy. One of the first symptoms of an unhealthy soul is a loss of joy, and you see that people are no longer filled with joy because of their burden. They're overwhelmed. They're busy. It's not well with their soul. So now I want you to talk to your friends around you again, and I want you to answer this question. How can we care for this thing that we call our soul? What are the ways that we can care for our soul? What do you do? What can you do to care for your soul? And how has that worked? And then I want you to be prepared to share with the rest of us what are the things that you've learned that really help you care for your soul. Go ahead and discuss this.

I want to add one thing to your discussion. You're talking about how you care for your soul and how they help you, but I also want you to share what are the obstacles caring for your soul. So what are the obstacles? And what has helped you overcome those obstacles? Go ahead.

Okay. Now you can bless the rest of us by sharing what you have used to help care for your soul.

Participant(s): This is a very important subject for me. Me as a church leader, just like everyone else, we take care of other people, and very seldom we have people to whom we can pour our heart out. We carry a lot of stress: family stress, ministry stress, relational pressure. So often we feel worn out. What can we do? Yeah, personality-wise, I'm quite passive. I allow myself to stay under stress. One day I'll burn out. So I pray and ask God to show me who I can open my heart to, and I will go to that person and open up my heart. Sometimes this person doesn't have to be someone that I know very well. I will pray about that. And if the Spirit directs me, I will approach them, share my heart with them, and trust that they will help me.

I have two co-workers who are very close with me. I can tell them anything. My deepest sin. I can open up to them. And I'm very trustworthy of my wife. Completely open. And also, I give my children genuine care. I'm genuine to my brothers and sisters. So I seek genuine relationships. In my original family, I experienced a lot of hurt. Yeah, my father was very violent. I had to go through a process of healing for me to be free from those damaged memories. So I keep encouraging my wife, I care for my children, and I do my best to encourage my co-workers. So now after all this effort, I now have a healthy soul. Still at times I don't feel the people I can pour out my heart to. That's my story.

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Greetings to everyone. I can think of three ways. The first is to have fellowship with God. Spiritual healing with God through the word praying, worshipping, opening my heart before Him. Having fellowship with Him. Without this fellowship, nothing works.

The second way is through people around us, just like our brother shared previously. There will be times when we need to talk with people and pour our hearts out, and then they'll speak into our lives. So this means a lot of fellowship. Sometimes just listening to preachers will also help. So the second way is through our interpersonal relationships.

The third is a conviction. We need to have a conviction in our hearts knowing that everything that happens in our life is permitted by God and carries His good purpose. The last thing, the conviction, requires an attitude of trusting, believing, hoping in God, and also thankful attitude. Besides this, it also takes time. As time goes by our confidence in God gets built up, and we see the good work He's doing in our lives. That in turn will build the conviction that God is good for us.

I can illustrate this point through Joseph's life or my own life. Joseph suffered a lot. It took a long time for him to trust everything he suffered and experienced was God's purpose. I experienced a lot of difficulties, and through that process I learned that God will not make any mistake in my life. Thank you.

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There are ways to care for our souls, some practical ways. Sometimes we need to change our channel. Switch the channel. You can go out on a trip, for example, seeing the nature that God made. This may not look spiritual to some Christians; For example, I'm a lady, and I want to go shopping for a little while. I may go to a friend and say, "May I have a chat? But let's not talk about spiritual things, like my ministry." Exercise and sports can help. Chinese ministers are not very good at exercising. Physical exercise. If we ignore our health and physical exercises, that's not spiritual.

One of our obstacles is too many responsibilities. Sometimes we feel like apart from us, if we stop working, the earth stops turning. Sometimes it's not really busy, but we make ourselves busy out of momentum. We cannot stop working. We feel like we're alive. As long as we have ministry work going on, we feel alive. We feel our existence. Sometimes we don't have much time or a place to go. The last obstacle I want to mention is that we're not consciously aware that we need to take care of ourselves.

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I enjoyed some of the things you said because we have many of those things too. So, as well as the things that you said, we said have fun and go out in nature. I know we've already shared about sharing your heart with other people. It's important to have friends that you can have fun with and who can lift you up. We also said about having a good diet and a good night sleep. Make a plan. Make a program. And when as leaders we hear a lot of people's difficulties and problems, we need to give these to Jesus and try to create a space, so that that doesn't bring our souls down. And it's very important to have a day of rest. To have Sabbath.

So we spoke about some of the obstacles: not having a Sabbath's rest, always giving and not taking time to receive, housework, and a lack of rest.

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I've talked with people whose relatives just passed away, and I ask the people who are still alive to recall the life of the dead and ask them what's the meaning of their life, how have they impacted you, why am I living, what's the meaning of my life. Sometimes I spend the whole day there. When I focus on wrestling these life issues. My heart will release.

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For me, there are a few things that I do. Whether I feel good or not, I'm honest with God. I tell him honestly how I feel. When I pour out my heart sometimes I feel a voice in the back of my head saying, "What's the use? What's the use of telling Him all this?" But I'll ignore this. I'll continue to pour out my heart to God because a lot of times it doesn't really help to talk to people. Another thing I do is to write. I write my feelings. I write it down. The benefit of writing down or journaling is that sometimes later you can look back and feel so encouraged. Another thing I do is when I'm stressed out, I'll ask my leader if I can take a break. Take a pause. If you're already carrying too much to continue, it would only make your situation worse, so why not take a pause? Other people may not understand why you're taking time off, but you'll be the one benefitting from it.

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Sleep. Yup, that's what God did to Elijah. Listening to music. Yeah, music speaks to my heart. Sometimes I do need others' care, especially those who know me well. Yeah, sometimes I need to allow myself some private time. Be away from crowds.

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The obstacles we face. One of it is distance from God. Lack of intimacy with God. Another one is the demand of ministry; I feel the demand. I feel pressured. Sometimes relational tension and relational hurt and wounds can be obstacles. Another obstacle is the wrong way of thinking. The wrong way of behavior patterns. For an example, things that I have learned when I was a little boy from my original family is a performance-driven attitude. I want to do things to earn favor. So when I come to God, I also push myself to do things to earn God's favor. Also, sometimes big tragedies or sufferings in life can also become obstacles.

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We need to have a hobby. A lot of time ministers can only do one thing: preach. Maybe preach and sleep. So we need to have a hobby. The chance to do something we really like.

Michael Hoisington: Well, thank you. Those were wonderful ideas for all of us. The thing is you have to know your soul. And what do you need that restores you? Some things will be similar, but some things will be different. So you just can't look at another person and do what they do. You have to know what it is that restores your soul. And I'm so glad that things we don't think of as spiritual are brought up.

Sometimes the thing we need the most is to take a nap, but do we have the freedom just to take that nap? And so, we need to know our soul and what restores it.

Now there are a number of spiritual and historical practices that in some way need to be a part of our practice. Many of you mentioned that. We need to be in God's Word and allowing it to speak to us. We need to be in conversation with God for prayer. Both talking and listening. As many of you mentioned, we all need, as I believe, a spiritual friend. Every one of us needs someone that we can be honest with. Most people sometimes wear a mask. We need to have someone that we can take the mask off and be real. So you need a spiritual friend, and you need to have the time to meet with them regularly so you can share your heart and soul.

Another practice that I think is very significant is I think we all need time of silence and solitude. A time when we get away from the busyness, a time where we get away from the noise, a time when we get away from our cell phones, an extended time to just be silent and let God speak into our lives. And so, I would recommend to all of you to take one day or two days to just get away to a place where you can be silent because that will help your soul.

I think everything else has been mentioned. We need time to worship. Worship restores the soul. And so, what is it that helps you? I want you think about how you can care for the souls of those who are above you. What are the things you can do? And back there someone said, "You need to have a plan." I would just say, "You need to be intentional." Soul care doesn't happen by accident. So whether it's your own soul, those above you, those you're walking together with, or those that you're leading your question should not only be what are they doing, but how is it with their souls, and how can I encourage them to take care of their souls, and how can I show them I really care. Not just what they're doing, but I care about who they are before Jesus.

Well, thank you all for being here. Thank you all for sharing. Let me just close with a word of prayer. *Father, we're so thankful to hear and to reflect on the ways we can care for our souls. And I want to pray for everybody here as they think about and are intentional about caring for their own souls. Through the power of the Holy Spirit overcoming obstacles that prevent them from caring for their soul. And I pray that they all will be able to say, "It is well with my soul." So may they be intentional about caring for their own souls and the souls of those around them. May You guide, direct, bless, and empower them to do this. And we pray that this will bring glory to Jesus Christ. Amen.*