

Series: KILLING ME SOFTLY—March 25, 2007

CARING FOR THE PART NO ONE SEES
Psalm 23

I. INTRO

- A. You have a part to you that is more **you** than anything else—but you've never seen it. In fact, you never **will** actually see it, because it's invisible. It somehow becomes the collection of all the experiences and attitudes life has brought—but it's more than that. It's bigger than that. It's way stronger than you would ever think, and yet unbelievably vulnerable and tender. It is affected by your health, your emotions and thinking patterns—and yet can stabilize—or sabotage all three.
-Even though it was a physical union between a man and woman that brought you into existence—they didn't create this part of you. God did. And because God created it, it will outlive this universe. It's your soul. Your soul is what makes sense of every other part of you.
- B. The best illustration I can think of for the soul is the root system of a tree. What you and I see above the ground can be spectacular—huge, massive, strong—but it ain't nothin' without the roots. A tree needs a root system to nourish it. Cut off the root system? It's as good as dead. Oh, it may hang around for a while, but it will dry up, get hard, stop producing fruit—and eventually rot.

-And the root system of a tree needs to keep growing so that the tree can keep growing. If a 100 foot oak has the root system of a 10 foot sapling—**Poof!** First breath of wind that comes along—it'll go down.

In fact, the stability of a tree in high winds and dry summers shows what kind of root system it has under it.

-God wants me—and you—to grow, to produce good things—and to remain standing when things get tough. To do that, we need strong, healthy souls. And that's what I want to talk about for a few minutes today.

II. I AM YOUR SOUL

- A. Back in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, word on the street had it that we were pretty much hollow. Grown up germs. But more recently, people have become very aware of their souls—of this spiritual part of life you can't see—but can't ignore.
1. There's a reason for that—and it's because your soul/my soul is the part that integrates everything else—body, mind and emotions. It's the part of us that can get bored, or restless, or distracted by guilt at the height of pleasure or success. And it's because pleasure and success doesn't satisfy the soul. Love, peace, meaning, and significance do. In fact, your soul is the part of you that is running your life at any given moment. And when it's not running right, **nothing** runs right!
-Years ago, my sister, Bev, was driving from New York to Pittsburgh in his huge 1972 Chrysler Imperial—the ultimate in land yachts and fat rides. They were gabbing away and didn't notice the little red idiot light on in the dash that said there was no oil. That is, until it threw a rod right through the side and the engine came to a grinding halt—as did all the bells and whistles! Just like the engine in a car—if your soul isn't running right—it doesn't make any difference how big and shiny the exterior of your life is!
-Of course, the deal with the soul is that one day we have to give an account of it

to the one who gave it to us.

- B. The Bible is the only **manual** for the soul that I know of. And the information is extremely accurate—because it was inspired by the One who created the soul and written by people who had one!
1. For example, the soul can be in a lot of pain. Most of us know what that feels like. And the book in the Bible that talks more about the soul, and the pain it can feel, is **Psalms**. David and the other writers use some words you might find helpful in categorizing things you've felt.
 - a. When David had people intent on destroying him, he says that his soul felt **forlorn**—or totally isolated and desperate. Ever felt that way? It's awful, isn't it!

-In another setting, David says, "My soul is **full of trouble**, my soul is **consumed with longing**, my soul is **weary**." Ever been in a situation where the pressure and the hassles are relentless—and even though you're getting plenty of sleep, there's this profound tiredness way down inside? Well, David identifies that.
 - b. Not many people talk about their soul, do that. It feels kind of unusual when it happens. But Jesus talks about his **own** soul in some very transparent ways. Think of it. He's God the Son, the Messiah, Savior of the world. And just before He goes to the cross to give his life for us, He says to his closest friends, **My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Mark 14:34 TNIV)**.

-There's a little chorus we used to sing as a kid--apparently of Scottish origin. Every once in a while I'll sing it just to annoy Lori. **"Cheer up ye saints of God, there's nothing to worry about. Nothing to make you feel afraid, nothing to make you doubt. Remember Jesus never fails, so why not trust him and shout. You'll be sorry you worried at all tomorrow morning."**

-Apparently Jesus didn't write this chorus—because He cried and sweat blood that night! Sometimes life has a way of crushing your soul.
 - c. The Bible makes it very clear that it is in our souls where we deal with God. In fact, the human soul **needs** God. It was given by God—and created by Him in such a way that it needs Him to live. And our souls feed on truth. That's why worship in this context has the effect that it does on us; it speaks truth in a language the soul loves—music.
 2. The soul has allies—like truth and love and encouragement. But it's main enemy is sin. And that's a problem because the truth the Bible teaches is that we have **all** sinned. **"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is (Jer. 17:9 NIV)?"**
 - a. As you know, Woody Allen disgraced himself a number of years ago by having a sexual relationship with his adopted daughter—and then marrying her. Know what he said about this when he was confronted with it in an interview?

"The heart wants what the heart wants." That's it. That's apparently supposed to explain the whole bizarre thing. **The heart wants what the heart wants.** And **that's** why our heart needs washed and changed.

- b. But, I knew the heart was deceitful before Woody Allen said what he did. See, my heart is deceitful. I have to check it on it's honestly about money, about not making myself sound better than I am to get approval from others.
- Sin and deceit is the most blatant fact about everyone's life—but when we're called on it—what's our temptation? "Not me! **Couldn't** be me! I don't do things like that!"
- c. As some of you know, Lori and I spent time last week with my Mother. It horrifies me to see how the cancer in her lungs is stealing her breathing space and filling it with diseased tissue—to the point that she now is on oxygen several times a day.
- And that's what sin does. It replaces healthy soul tissue with disease. But there's for **this** disease, there's a cure. Not many—**one!** Today, we will celebrate that cure by taking bread and wine—symbolic of Jesus payment for our sin on a cross.
- And if we refuse? We get shut off from what we most want out of life. Jealousy and envy are diseases of the soul. So is hatred. And unforgiveness. And we can **all** excuse it, can't we? Because we all get hurt in life. Betrayed. People, intentionally and unintentionally, inflict pain on us, do unjust things, damage our property, our egos, our reputations. And then we have to decide what we're going to do with that stuff. And it's **so** hard to let it go!
- d. This may surprise you, but moving from one sexual partner to another damages the soul. The Bible says that a marriage between a man and a woman is the right place for sex—that we become one flesh with that person. When we join, body and soul, with another person—then rip apart and move on, we leave a piece of our soul with that person. That, combined with the guilt sin causes can do a lot of damage.
- e. See, the bottom line is that your soul was made for God. It only works right when He is first. Sin, ultimately, is putting other things before God. When you put money, success, pride, friends, pleasure, your appearance--**anything** before God, it ultimately affects the health of your soul.
- f. Now, here's the problem—we **all** do that from time to time. And that's why Jesus went to the cross. He made it possible for my soul and yours to find what it needs most. Forgiveness. A good **wash**. So. Have you ever had your soul **washed**?
3. You can't ignore your soul. What's a soul like that's been neglected? I can think of some adjectives. Cynical. Anxious. Critical. Self-pitying. Discouraged. Irritable. Driven.
- What's a healthy soul like? Again, some adjectives: Light-hearted. Passionate. Loving. Trusting. Hopeful. Peaceful. Resilient. Have close friendships. Transparent.
- The most important thing to know is that God **loves** your soul. Treasures it. And

He wants to help **you take care of it!**

III. CARING FOR YOUR SOUL

- A. Let me tell you what I think. I think for most people to take their souls seriously, they have to come to a defining moment in life where God **somehow** speaks and moves inside them. Where they understand that joy and peace and contentment—what they want **most**—comes from having a healthy soul.
- Again—let me get real specific about what my soul - your soul needs most. God. Almost 400 years ago, the mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, said, **There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every [person] which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator.**
1. When we built an addition on our house several years ago, we had to dig this 9 foot deep hole that took a big chunk out of the root system of a cherry tree that was there. Can anyone guess what happened? It **died!** We had to have it cut down and hauled away.

-See, roots are what give a tree the water and nutrients they need to survive. Jesus once made this statement: **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says." (He said this in regard to the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive...)** (John 7:38-39 Msg.)
 2. When we receive God's washing and forgiveness, made possible through Jesus' death, the Spirit of God takes up residence in our soul. And **He** becomes the life-giving water our soul needs to be healthy and grow good things; bring good fruit. But we have to **invite** Him to do that!
 3. So. Have you ever **done** that? Have you ever, in your heart, believed that Jesus Christ came--not to give us a bunch of rules—not to make people feel guilty, but to give them **life**. Life at the core. Have you ever felt this life from the Spirit that flows like a river—**even when things are going rotten in your life?**

-Have you ever invited God, through Jesus, to totally fill that God-shaped vacuum, and then live there; to give you power over the stuff that keeps dragging you off on detours? He **will** do that, you know! And, right now, He's just a prayer away!
- B. Question. How does God care for our souls? There is a beautiful description of how He does this in Psalm 23—where David describes God as the My Shepherd. Of course this totally synchs up with Jesus description of himself as the Good Shepherd. What David says here in the power of God is brilliant.
1. He starts with our deepest need. Discontentment. And it is **exactly** this restlessness that gets us into trouble. Lack of money, loneliness, boredom, unhappiness—lots of things can trigger it; but it's an itch we can't scratch; a dull ache that won't go away. We think, **Hmmmm! What if...??**

-And it's precisely at this juncture that our soul starts wondering into destructive stuff. David says, **The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing (Psalm 23:1 TNIV)**. The message is, "If you will let God be the shepherd, the Care-giver, the doctor for your soul—**He** knows how to solve the **I WANT** issues of life.
 2. And that brings up a second soul need we have. Rest. Peace. **He makes me lie**

down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters (Ps. 23:2 TNIV).

Peace, by the way, is a **need**, not a **want**. Peace isn't a lack of ambition; it's the sense inside that **all is well**. What would it feel like for you to truly have peace at the core of your life? Jesus promised a kind of peace that's not dependent on how good life happens to be going on any given day.

-Sheep experts say that a sheep's health is very dependent on the rest they get—and they **won't rest** unless they're well-fed, safe, at peace with the **other** sheep (interestingly enough), and not driven crazy by insects. Guess who sheep look to for that? The shepherd.

-How's your peace quotient these days? Sometimes it's simply a matter of taking the time and space in your life to find peace and perspective.

Laird gave a great talk on busyness a couple of weeks ago. A recent survey showed that **busyness** is the single greatest obstacle Christ-followers face that keeps them from doing the things that will help them grow spiritually.

-You need to know that finding the quiet, the place to listen to the Spirit, the time to just be in the presence of God **will not just pop up in your life!** You'll have to **make** time. Make sacrifices.

-Our problem is that we've got these ADHD souls that are used to multiple streams of noise at once--and it's so common we think it's normal! I've always been fascinated by the wording here. He **MAKES me lie down**. Any of you with small children who occasionally resist this? "No, don't **wanna** go to bed!" We say things like, "You're tired. You're whining. **I** need you to go to bed!" Sometimes God has to **make** us lie down and rest!

3. Another soul need we have. Sometimes we get stuck. Sometimes we fall down—and it's like we can't get back on our feet. Phillip Keller, a man who had a sheep ranch on Victoria Island, writes about what David—also a sheep specialist—was talking about. A sheep apparently can get **cast down** or **cast**.

-What happens is that a sheep will look for a cozy indentation to lie down in and chew their cud. If their wool is heavy with water or mud, or if they're pregnant—or just plain fat, they'll get rolled over on their back. Their feet will be helplessly pawing the air, "Ha-a-a-lp! I've fallen and I can't get up!"

-If the shepherd doesn't find them in time and **restore** them—get them on their feet, they'll die. That's exactly what David means when he says, **He restores my soul (Ps. 23:3 NIV)**.

-It's great imagery, isn't it? We usually get stuck when we're trying to find a short cut to something we want. Or we're following a false shepherd—like money or success or popularity. And we get stuck in destructive habits, or with a load of bitterness, or in a nasty, embarrassing situation.

-It's funny, you know, imposter shepherds—other things you're trusting in to guide your life--never come looking for you. Only Jesus—the Good Shepherd. And he doesn't kick us around—He helps us get on our feet again and find our way

-Sometimes my soul wanders. Does yours? Some of you, right now, may be wandering. You may be in danger. And there's a **Good Shepherd** calling your

- name!
4. Know what another soul need is that we have—but sometimes have trouble admitting? It's the need for direction. For clarity. Anyone here ever find that life gets confusing? The choices alone are overwhelming! And sometimes we never even ask God what he things; we choose what **looks** good.
- Phillip Keller, (remember? the sheep rancher?) says that sheep are pretty much guided through life by the next clump of green grass. And they'll just keep going—right over cliffs, right into briars
And sometimes, right into the jaws of a predator. Just imagine a sheep in a briar patch—I mean, it would work like Velcro!
-Can I just be really straight with you? Humans are pretty smart—but we too are pretty much guided by the next clump of green grass; the next deal; the next relationship. Our thought is, "I'm not an idiot! I can find my way!" But what we **don't** know and **can't** know is the future. We don't know what the next 5 minutes holds!
-That's why the wisest person who ever lived said twice in the same book, **There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death** (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25 NIV). And **that's** why we need a shepherd, who **knows** the future and **knows** the right way to guide us in the **right paths**. God isn't like some crystal ball—where you can pretend to be interested in Him until he shows you the future. Nope. You have to **follow**.
5. Another need we humans have when it comes to our souls. To be free from fear. I'm not talking about becoming a sky-diving, bunge-jumping, cobra-kissing adrenaline junkie. I'm talking about being able to face aging, personal failure, betrayal, rejection, financial reversal and cancer—and have peace of mind. Not the pretend kind where you suck it up and get stoic. Real peace.
-Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Ps. 23:4 NIV). A shepherd carried two things—besides his lunch. A big stick to clobber enemies—like poisonous snakes and wolves.
And a stick with a hook to pull sheep out of bad situations. The Good Shepherd doesn't just carry a really **BIG** stick—He works the night shift so I can sleep!
-Fear is very destructive. When we're afraid, we start doing destructive things to ourselves and others. I think that's probably why the Bible records God as saying—365 times--"**Do not be afraid**" 365 times!
6. There's something else our souls need to be healthy and filled with peace. Freedom from worry about the future.
-That's what David's getting at in this next verse. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**
- a. Apparently, in the early spring, a shepherd would go up into the table lands—where the best grazing was—and prepare them for the sheep. Make sure they were safe; trap predators, pull poisonous weeds—things like that. This is the point; wherever the sheep went, the **shepherd had been there first!**
 - b. And if you're following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, you will **never** find yourself in a place he hasn't visited first! When I lost my Dad, it was so comforting to understand that Jesus, **my** Shepherd—Leader—had been

preparing me, preparing my Dad, preparing my Mom—my whole family.
 -I've gone through tough times—as have many of you. I get surprised—but God **doesn't!** See, my life is in **His** hands—no one else's.
 -What shepherd do you have preparing your future? People think money can be a good shepherd for that—but money doesn't have that kind of power. Money can't keep you from collapsing. Truth is, money has enough trouble taking care of it's **own** future, from what I've seen!

7. There's one more thing that our souls need to healthy. Hope. A sense of having a life that's blessed. **You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life (Ps. 23:5-6 NIV).**

-What does it mean to lead a blessed life? Does it mean that life kisses you until you're 95 and then you die without pain and go to Heaven—and all your kids are a **stunning** success? In one word: **NOPE!**

-What it does mean is that you never lose **HOPE**. Hope is knowing that your past is forgiven; that your future is secure in Jesus; and that your present will **some day** make sense because of how it formed you to be like Jesus. Life my flip you on your back—but your **spirit** is resilient—and always lands right-side up. You can't buy the blessing of God; you can't inherit it from your family; you can't get it at church or marry it or trick God into giving it.

What you **can** do is **choose** the path of blessing that comes from following the Good Shepherd. See, here's the deal. There is only one way you can have the blessing of God on your life; it's to put your soul in God's hands, **leave** it there, and **cooperate** with him. All other paths lead to **non-blessing**. Count on it!

- a. Every child craves their parent's blessing. The sense of love an approval; the stamp of "OK" on your life. But sometimes we get a curse instead. Sometimes it comes in the form of shame—or words to the effect that you'll never amount to anything. "I wish I never had you!"
- b. I sometimes wonder of David knew that. When Samuel was looking for the right son to choose as king of Israel, Jesse, his Dad, didn't even mention David's name—like he was the runt of the litter! But God had already told Samuel, **The Lord does NOT look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the HEART (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV).**
- c. I know some of you well enough to know that you've pretty much come through life with no sense of blessing; no sense of favor—of being someone's treasure. And that's really, **really** hard. I know. It's very hard to feel **unblessed** and **joyful** at the same time. Something happened to David when Samuel found him, poured oil over his head and said, "God has chosen **you.**"
 -As you walk this path, you can have the sense—no matter **where** you've been—that God's hand is on your life. And if you watch for it—you will find evidence of God's handiwork all over to be **grateful**. And gratitude in life is, in itself, a source of joy and blessing to you and to the others around you. But it's a **choice** you make.

-And God gives those who follow Him the chance to live a trail of people who've been blessed by them. If you will follow in the way of the

Shepherd—you can leave a legacy of changed people behind you. People glad that you lived; that you touched their lives in some way. That's what David is saying; ***Surely goodness and love will FOLLOW me all the days of my life.*** Would you like that?

- 8 The ultimate thing your soul needs and searches for is... ***Home.*** That's where this Psalm ends. Anyone here ever been away from home for an extended period of time? It's exciting at first—but then your heart begins to long for ***home.*** To sit in your family room in your jimmies and eat a bowl of cereal! You want to go ***home.*** -And your ***soul*** longs for home. Ever been at a concert, or with a group of friends, or in a gorgeous location where the beauty is breathtaking—and it's so ***good,*** your heart is so full, you wish it could last forever? That's our longing for home. Whenever we dream of perfection, long for a leader who will always inspire us and never disappoint us--we're longing for ***HOME.*** A home you'll never find on this planet. Only the home where God is. ***...And I will dwell in the house of the Lord...forever (Ps. 23:6 NIV).***

-I've said this before—but I'll say it again. Right this very moment, you have a shepherd. You have someone or something you've chosen to guide your life; you've entrusted your soul to something or someone. You're looking to whatever that is to find contentment, rest, direction, safety, blessing, joy, hope and meaning. -The variety on this is huge, but most people, if they haven't chosen the Good Shepherd to care for their soul think that ***something outside of them*** can meet these soul needs. Like marrying the right person, or a great group of friends, or making money and being successful, or being healthy and beautiful—or being well-known—can make them happy and bring them home. Won't happen. Jesus called these shepherds impostors—said they come to steal, kill and destroy.

-Your soul is the most important part of who you are. The health of your soul is ***directly*** related to everything you want in life—and ***only*** the One who made it knows how to care for it. And I want to challenge you this morning to actively make Him your shepherd. To actually say, "Jesus, Lord—be ***my*** shepherd, and I ***will*** follow you!"

IV. YOUR SOUL IS WORTH THE EFFORT!

Jesus ***loves*** your soul. More than you do—and He proved it by dying on a cross so your soul could be washed free of sin, guilt, shame and an unblessed life. He died so you could have peace. So you could be free from fear. So you could have hope.

What do you need Him to do today? Need contentment and peace? Are you stuck somewhere—and need freed? Are you afraid—or have you lost your way? Are you worried about the future? Feeling hopeless and joyless and meaningless? Ask. Just ask. He made a way to do that.