

## INTRODUCTION

As we begin a new year, I’m teaching a three-week series entitled, “Habits of Healthy Christians.” We learned last week that we are created in the image of God. That means that as God is a Tri-unity, we are also designed as a tri-unity. There’s only one God, but He expresses Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There’s only one of you and you are body, soul, and spirit. C.S. Lewis wrote, “You don’t have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body.”

Last week we learned that since our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is an act of worship to stay physically fit. Next week, we’re going to look at the function of your spirit in a message entitled, “How to Stay Spiritually Sharp.” Part of that means having a discerning spirit, so I’ll be giving a quick seven reasons WHY the world won’t end on December 21, 2012 as some have predicted.

Today, we’re going to be talking about you, that is, your soul. In the 1960s a new term entered our American vernacular, soul food. It was associated with the cuisine of African-Americans who lived in the south. Soul food describes things like fried chicken, cornbread, turnip or collard greens, chitlins, and anything with lots of Crisco. Growing up in Alabama we didn’t call it soul food, we just called it FOOD, because that’s what all of us ate! Some folks in Alabama were even known to eat possum. Now before you call them a bunch of Alabama rednecks, I know some Texans who have eaten armadillo, which is just possum on the half shell. Of course, we love our Mexican food here. By the way, what do you get when you cross soul food with Mexican food? Nacho Mama!

Since this series is all about health, I have to add a disclaimer that a diet of soul food is high in fat, starch, sodium, and cholesterol, and has been associated with higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart attack. But I say, “Compared to tofu and bean sprouts, sometimes it’s WORTH it!”

But I want to talk about another kind of soul food that’s good for you. There is help from God’s Word on how you can nourish your soul each day.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24. “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”

It’s easy to distinguish between the body and the soul, because the body is visible. But it’s more difficult to distinguish between the soul and spirit because both of them are invisible. The only way to distinguish between the soul and the spirit is to study the Bible. We read in Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit.”

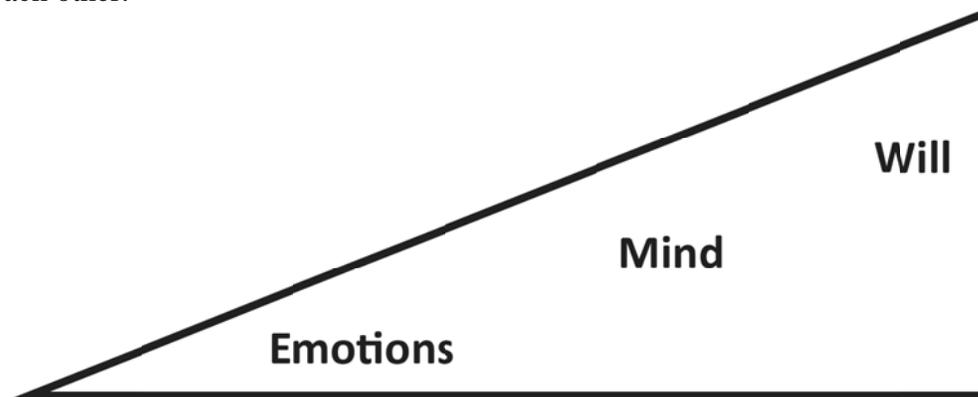
We’ll speak more about the spirit in the next message, but for now, think of your soul as your

personality. Your spirit is the innermost part of your being that enables you to connect with your Creator. With that introduction, let’s learn about our souls. More than that, let’s think about the care and feeding of our souls—soul food that’s *good* for you.

## **I. Your soul (personality) includes your emotions, mind, and will**

It is your soul that lives inside your body. Just as an astronaut on a spacewalk needs a space suit to survive in space, your body is like an earth suit that your soul lives in while here. Both Paul and Peter wrote that life is like living in a tent. Our body is the tent, and our soul/spirit is the person who lives in the tent. The tent is wasting away; as we get older it gets tattered and worn, but what is living in the tent can keep on being renewed and refreshed every day. You can only see the “outer me” but there is an “inner me” who lives inside my body. My body is 58 years old, but I still feel like the kid I’ve always been. It’s just that when I look in the mirror I say, “What’s my dad doing in there?”

Your soul contains three parts of your personality. It is with your soul that you feel emotions: happy, sad, lonely, or thrilled. The range of emotions is almost without limit. With your soul, you think. Your thinking may be wise, or it may be faulty, but everyone thinks. With your will, you make choices. If you want to understand yourself, it’s important to know how these three relate to each other.



As this wedge illustrates, your emotions are the shallowest part of your personality. If you are living primarily based upon your emotions; get ready for a rollercoaster life of violent ups and downs. The deepest part of your personality is your will. It is the part of you that makes decisions. It is your mind that is the central component and is the most important.

For instance, this morning, you exercised your will and came to church. Your emotions might have said, “I don’t FEEL like going to church.” But your mind said, “I know I need to go to church, that’s what God’s Word says.” So your will listened to your mind instead of your emotions and here you are—congratulations. There are Christians still in bed reading the comics because they made a decision based on their emotions rather than their mind.

When I talk about your mind, I’m not just talking about your brain. Your mind is what you do with your brain. Your brain is like a piano, and your mind is like the music played on a piano.

Someone said the mind is an amazing instrument. It starts working the moment that you’re born and doesn’t stop until you stand up in front of a group to speak!

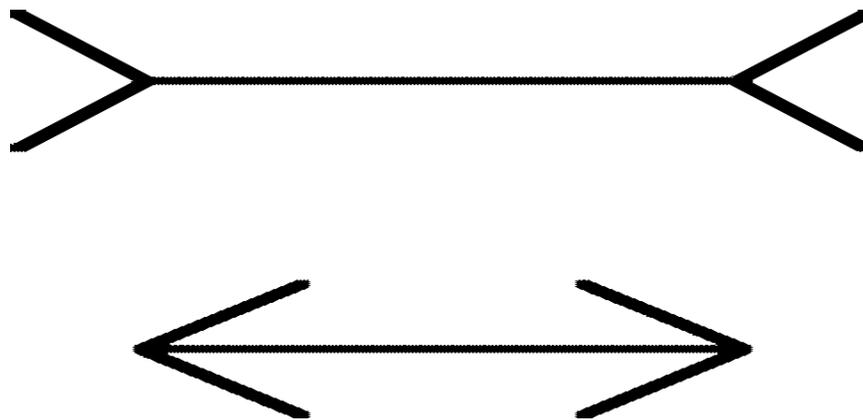
Your mind is the control center of your life. Think of it as the air traffic control tower at DFW (they actually have several that are all connected electronically). Every day about 1,600 flights land or take off from DFW and every single one of them has to talk to the tower and get clearance before they can proceed.

Do you control your thoughts, or do you let your thoughts control you? A little girl said to her mother. “Today I had a wonderful day, mom.” Her mom asked, “What made it so wonderful?” She said, “Yesterday, my thoughts pushed me around, but today I pushed them around.”

So the key to having a healthy soul is to practice mind control—and I don’t mean some kind of brainwashing. I mean allowing your mind to be controlled by the Word of God and by the Spirit of God instead of by your emotions. Someone or something WILL control your mind; it’s just a matter of who or what. Let’s talk about how you can surrender your mind to God.

## II. When your thoughts mislead you, God can renew your mind

Our minds can mislead us. Anytime you see an optical illusion, your mind is telling you something that isn’t true. Perhaps you’ve seen the picture of the two lines that are the same length. Your brain tells you that the line on the top is longer, but when you measure them, they’re exactly the same.



So if you’re thinking the wrong way, it can lead to trouble. There’s a famous saying that comes from Alcoholics Anonymous that I like. I don’t know who wrote it, because he or she is anonymous. “It’s not our drinking but our thinking that makes us stinking.” Well, actually, it’s both, but they are right. Every decision we make in life starts with a thought. There’s no doubt about the connection; bad thinking leads to bad behavior.

When I was a teenager I memorized Proverbs 23:7 from the King James Version. It says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” It was the favorite scripture of one of my high school Sunday

School teachers. He quoted it all the time. He would say, “Whatever you think about the most you will become.” Of course, that scared me at the time because what I thought about the most was girls! But it is true you become what you think about most. If you allow thoughts of worry to linger you become a worrier. If you think fearful thoughts, you become a coward.

Your mind is remarkable. It is more capable than any computer, but it has one limitation. You can really only think about one thing at a time. Your mind is like a TV that can’t be turned off, but it can only display one channel at a time.

Let’s do a little experiment. Right now, think about an elephant. Okay, now think about a Christmas tree. Now try to think about them both, but separately. You might imagine an elephant with a Christmas tree on its back, or a big Christmas tree with an elephant in it, but for each image alone, you have to switch back and forth.

Once you understand that, it’s easier to control your thoughts. For instance, temptation is when the devil puts a sinful thought in your mind. I know I’m about to use a double negative, but it’s the only way I know how to say it: The way to overcome temptation is NOT by NOT thinking about the sin. You can’t just erase it from your mind, but you can replace it. Remember our elephant and Christmas tree exercise? Let’s apply it to temptation. Ready? Okay, now DON’T think about an elephant! Don’t think about a big gray animal with a long nose and floppy ears. Don’t think about four stumpy legs and a swishing tail. That didn’t work did it? Okay, now think about a Christmas tree. Simple, huh? So when Satan plants a wicked thought in your mind, just choose to replace it with a thought about Jesus dying on the cross for you. Or think about a favorite scripture or the words to a praise song.

When you have thoughts of worry, replace them with a scriptural confession like, “I’m casting all my cares on the Lord, because I know He cares for me” (1 Peter 5:7). When you have thoughts of fear, choose to replace them with a scripture like, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

Our will is the deepest part of our soul. When you surrender your will to God’s will, He will renew your mind. The Bible says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:11 that when he was a child he thought as a child, but when he became a man he put away childish things. His mind was renewed. When I was in the first grade, I was an outstanding kickball player. The pitcher would roll that big rubber ball, and then I’d take a running start and, POW! I’d kick it over everyone’s head. I got a home run nearly every time I kicked that ball. I was the best one in my class. I decided in the first grade I was going to be a professional kickball player, and would star in the National Kickball League one day.

Something changed my mind in the second grade however. I was watching television, and saw this fellow named Mickey Mantle. He had this bat in his hand, and somebody threw a ball at him, and he hit it over a fence. When I saw that, I thought, “I don’t want to play kickball

anymore.” I forgot all about kickball when I discovered baseball, because it was just something better. That’s what happens when God renews your mind. You stop thinking like the world thinks and you start thinking with the mind of Christ.

### **III. When you’re emotionally exhausted, Jesus can refresh your soul**

Just as our bodies get tired, our souls can get weary as well. Just as our bodies can experience pain, so can our souls. It’s just a different kind of pain. And soul pain and exhaustion is harder to pinpoint and treat than physical problems. When there’s a problem with your body, you go to a doctor and he or she prescribes medication or performs surgery. But the pain and fatigue in your soul isn’t as easy to treat.

Some emotional pain is unavoidable. Just as when you cut your finger, you’re going to bleed. If someone you love dies, you’re going to grieve. Divorce, loss of a job, rejection, depression, change, all of these produce emotional pain. But some soul pain isn’t as obvious. It masks itself and we find ourselves suffering and asking, “What’s wrong with me?” Here’s God promise when you are emotionally overwhelmed. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

A yoke was a wooden harness farmers used to team two oxen together. If Jesus is in the other side of the yoke, He supplies us with His strength and His direction. One of the most influential Christians of history was the man often called St. Augustine. He was pastor of a church in North Africa. Let me read you a quote from Pastor Augustine about the yoke of Jesus: “Any other burden oppresses and crushes you, but Christ’s yoke takes weight off you. Any other burden weighs you down, but Christ’s gives you wings. If you take a bird’s wings away, you might seem to be taking weight off it. But the more weight you take off, the more you tie it down to the earth. Give it back the weight of its wings and you will see how it flies.” The yoke of Christ is not a burden; it’s like getting the ability to fly. When you’re in the yoke with Jesus He refreshes your soul by revealing Himself to you.

### **IV. Healthy habits can nourish your soul**

How is your soul today? There is a direct correlation between the health of your soul and your overall satisfaction of life. As your soul goes, so goes your life.

There is a great Christian ministry called Soul Care, and they say there are five pillars to a healthy soul. Architecturally speaking, pillars support a roof and create space below. These five pillars of soul health can create space for God in your life. This year, why don’t you choose to start these habits?

#### **A. Daily prayer**

Prayer allows your mind to focus on God. The healthiest Christians I know have developed a habit of a regular time of prayer each day. Set a beginning goal of praying for 10 minutes. If you have trouble praying more than a few words, there are some things you can do to deepen your

prayer time. Try following the simple ACTS acrostic. Start with Adoration of God: Praise Him for Who He is. Then move to Confession of your sins: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas of your life where confession is needed. Then move to Thanksgiving: Thank God for what He does. Then finish with Supplication, which means “supply”: Ask God to supply the needs of others (that’s intercession), and then to supply your needs. Another way to improve your prayer life is to keep a prayer journal and write your prayers to God as a letter every day. You can write in a book with a pen, or start a prayer journal file on your computer or tablet.

## **B. Spiritual counsel**

Do you have someone walking with you through the tough times of life? This is an absolute essential for soul health. If you’re blessed, you have a trusted friend or family member who can be your encourager. The best way to have a friend is to BE a friend. Don’t wait for someone to seek you out as a friend, seek someone else out first.

But if you don’t have a close friend or family member to advise you, then it’s okay to seek out some wise spiritual advisor or counselor and just ask for their help. For years there has been a stigma associated with “counseling.” Some people would never seek counseling because they think it’s only for crazy people. I disagree. Counseling is for wise people. It’s for anyone who is going through a tough time and needs someone to help them through it. Our GraceWorks Ministry is not just for people who are in crisis. It’s also for anyone who needs some good spiritual advice. Our Stephen Ministry is another place to look for a friend to come alongside and just support you.

## **C. Reading/meditating on scripture**

Those who have healthy souls also make a habit of having a daily time of personal Bible Study. Don’t read the Bible like you would a novel or a magazine. You should read it like a love letter that God has written to you. Don’t read the Bible just to find the life principles it proclaims. Instead read it to get to know the Person who wrote it.

If you could read all the letters and emails I’ve ever written you would know a lot about me. The best way to learn about the God who made you is to read His G-mail (and I don’t mean Google, I mean God-mail).

## **D. Solitude/silence**

While I don’t recommend joining a monastery and taking a vow of silence, those monks were onto something. There is great value in solitude and silence. In our fast paced “wired” world, there is so much noise and static, it’s often hard to hear God’s voice. What has God been saying to you lately? If the answer is “nothing” could it be He’s speaking, but you’re just not listening?

Try taking a 20-minute gadget vacation this week. Turn off all your electronics and spend that time quietly listening for the voice of God. Better yet, schedule a time over the next month when you can find an isolated place out in nature and spend several hours with God. It will do wonders for your soul.

## E. Simplicity

If I could give you one final bit of advice to improve your soul it would be to SIMPLIFY. The next time you’re not taking a gadget vacation for your solitude time, google “simplify your life” or “de-clutter.” Gordon McDonald says one sign that your life is out of control is when every horizontal surface of your life is cluttered. I’m not just talking about physical clutter like you find in your workspace or your bathroom counter. You may suffer from digital clutter. I read a website on simplifying that says Americans suffer from digital packrattery. That’s the tendency to have keep hundreds of contacts, apps or twitter followers that distract you from the most important things of life.

Every one of us has too much stuff crowding our lives. Give it away if you want to breathe a little deeper. Over the past forty years I accumulated a library of several thousand books. I had them filling every bookcase in my study and even in stacks on the floor. Over the past six months, I’ve donated 2/3 of my library to the Green Acres Library. Now, every time I walk into my clean, de-cluttered study I smile.

## CONCLUSION

Before we leave the subject of your soul there is one important warning I must issue. I’ve been talking to Christians about soul health, but there are two kinds of people here today. Some souls are saved, and some are not. There is an issue MUCH more important than the health of your soul; it is whether your soul is saved or not.

Everyone has a soul and that soul will live on after you die. The greatest tragedy of life would be to lose your soul. Jesus said, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37)

When you lose something else you can replace it. If you lose your house, you can buy or build another house. If you lose your cell phone or your glasses, they can be replaced. I heard about a newlywed couple where the wife hadn’t learned to cook yet. Her husband came home and his wife was crying. He said, “What’s wrong, honey?” She said, “I baked you some biscuits for dinner but the dog jumped up on the counter and ate them all.” He said, “Don’t worry, sweetheart, we can always get another dog.”

Almost everything you lose can be replaced except your soul. Your soul will live on long after the sun is burned out and the stars are plucked from the sky. The Bible makes it clear that your soul will live on in heaven or in hell.

You don’t have to wonder what happens to a soul after death, because Jesus told us in Luke 16. He spoke about the souls of two men who had died. Lazarus, a poor beggar who lived a life of faith died and found himself at the side of Abraham in heaven. There was also a rich man who had lived an indulgent, selfish life who died. Here’s how Jesus described the destination of his soul. “The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity

on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.” (Luke 16:23-24) Abraham told the rich man to remember how he lived on earth, never caring that Lazarus was begging at his gate. But there is a chasm between heaven and hell that no person can cross once they have arrived at their eternal destination. Then the rich man said, “Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” (Luke 16:27-28)

Part of the rich man’s torment was seeing heaven and knowing he wasn’t there. He had memory of his life on earth. Hell is a place of remembrance and regret. If you die having rejected the free gift of eternal life I think you will remember this message today when I spoke about Jesus saving your soul. And if you don’t give your life to Christ today, you’ll regret it for eternity.

Lazarus’ soul was in the presence of Abraham—paradise. If you’re a Christian, the moment your body dies, your soul/spirit goes to be with the Lord. Paul wrote, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8) That’s why Christians don’t have to fear physical death. It is the process that escorts us into the presence of Jesus.

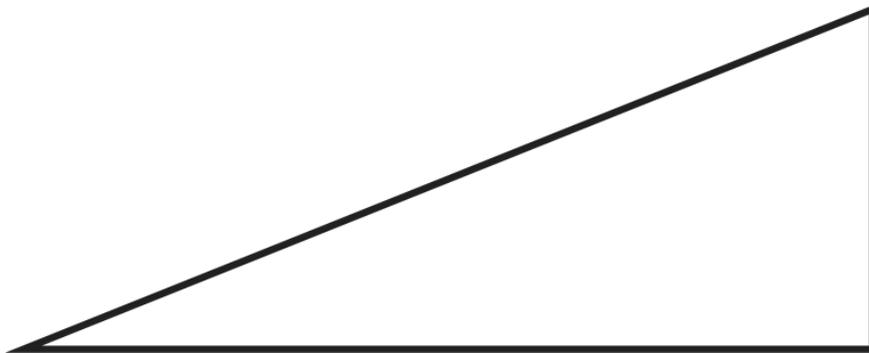
A little girl walked home from school every day. Her route took her through the local cemetery. She loved to feel the breezes, and she enjoyed the sound of the birds, and the silence in the cemetery. Sometimes she would just lie on her back in the grass and watch the shapes of the clouds change. She would skip through the cemetery singing songs, and whistling her favorite tunes. She loved to pause and read the names and dates of people on the tombstones. One day one of her friends said, “Why do you walk through the cemetery every day, aren’t you afraid?” The little girl answered, “No, I’m not afraid, it’s just the way to my home.”

And for a child of God, death is moving day—it’s the way to our real home!

Your soul is your most valuable asset. Don’t lose it and don’t abuse it. Take care to feed it plenty of soul food It’s good for you!

## OUTLINE

I. Your soul (personality) includes your emotions, mind, and will



II. When your thoughts mislead you, God can renew your mind

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”  
*Romans 12:2*

III. When you’re emotionally exhausted, Jesus can refresh your soul

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”  
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IV. Healthy habits can nourish your soul

- A. Daily prayer
- B. Spiritual counsel
- C. Reading/meditating on scripture
- D. Solitude/silence
- E. Simplicity

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This careful effort on your part may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you. I trust you will find that additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners.

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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*David O. Dykes, Pastor  
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