

## **SLIDE 1. Series: Everyday Disciples**

Teaching: *How Do We See Ourselves as God Sees Us?*

Sunday November 3.2024

Some time ago... I mentioned that I'd like to give us a chance in November to open the floor to a time of prayer. Specifically – to pray along the lines of HELP / THANKS / WOW – where HELP is a prayer of petition / THANKS is a prayer of gratitude / WOW is a prayer of acknowledgement that something extraordinarily good happened to us which was out of our control (what some might call a miracle) OR a prayer of acknowledgement that we partnered with God to do a good work with Him that He set out in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

### **SLIDE 2.**

**HELP = Prayer of Petition.**

**THANKS = Prayer of Gratitude.**

**WOW = something good that happened to you or your partner with God to do.**

We'll do this at the end of our teaching time this morning – to give you some time to think about what you might want to share.

For now – let's talk about: *How Do We See Ourselves as God Sees Us?*

Let me begin with this rhetorical question: *What do you see when you look in the mirror?*

Here's what I see when I look in the mirror...

I see a man in his late 50's who could stand to lose a few pounds. I've seen him for a while now - and seeing that portly him has filled me with some embarrassment and bits of self-condemnation.

I see a man of flesh and bone and wrinkles and scars.

And laugh lines.

I see a man with no hair and then a tuft of gray hair on his chin - inspired by keyboard player, singer and songwriter, Peter Gabriel.

I see bags under my eyes – and I feel the tiredness they seem to represent.

I always see a man wearing shorts!

I see a man who I never would have thought would be a pastor.

I see a pastor who tries to live a genuine, playful, and thoughtful Christ-centered life – who has enormous capacity for M+M peanuts!

I'll tell you how I seldom see myself!

As a *soul*.

And yet my soul is how I could best describe who I am.

Which is interesting – because I think many of us are used to thinking about our souls as a non-physical, immortal essence of who we are - separate from our bodies – something trapped in our flesh and bone to be released at death.

So, it would make sense that I don't see myself as a soul or – see my soul – because it would be invisible.

But the Bible doesn't really talk about it this way.

**SLIDE 3. The Hebrew word for "soul" is "nephesh."**

It occurs 755 times in the OT.

The most basic meaning of "nephesh" is "throat."

Like when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, they were hungry and thirsty, and they said to God, "We miss the cucumbers and melons we had in Egypt, and now our 'nephesh' has dried up!" (Nu. 11:5).

Or when Joseph was hauled off into slavery in Egypt, his "nephesh" was put into iron shackles (Ps. 105:18).

So then the Bible refers to the hungry, thirsty, satisfied soul (Ps. 107:5,9; Prov. 27:7; Jer. 31:31:12, 25) – the opening of the body for sustenance.

But "nephesh" doesn't only mean "throat."

Since your whole life and body depend on what comes in and out of your throat, "nephesh" could also be used to refer to the whole person.

The soul means the entire human being – needing food and clothing (Mt. 6:25) – with breathing organs and breath blown out to express life (Job 11:20).

At times – the word "soul" is used as interchangeable for "life" – both animal and human...

**SLIDE 4.** *...like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his "nephesh" (Prov. 7:21).*

**SLIDE 5.** *For those who find me find "nephesh" and receive favor from the Lord. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death (Prov. 8:35-36).*

A person doesn't **have** a soul. A person **is** a *living* soul.

## **SLIDE 6. We are not bodies with a soul. We are souls with a body.**

Christianity does not teach dualism – that our souls and bodies are separate. This was the teaching of ancient Greek philosophers – like Plato – which has found its way into the minds of many Christians.

We are, and always will be, ensouled bodies, or embodied souls.

This is why biblical people could use this word – “nephesh” - to refer to themselves – translated “me” or “I.”

“Like in Psalm 119,” points out Tim Mackie, “most translations read, ‘Let me live, that I may praise you’ (Ps. 119:175). In Hebrew, the poet literally says, ‘Let my ‘nephesh’ live, that ‘it’ may praise you.’ By using the word ‘nephesh,’ the poet emphasizes that his entire being, his life and his body, offers thanks to God.

“In the Song of Songs, the young woman constantly refers to her lover as ‘the one my ‘nephesh’ loves’ (SOS 3:1). And of course, love isn’t just an intellectual experience. It’s an emotion that activates your whole body, your entire ‘nephesh’.”

Perhaps this is why the Latin word for “soul” is “animus” – from which we get the word “animate” – which is to say that your soul gives life to your body.

Perhaps this is why the Greek NT word for “soul” is “psyche” – which encompasses the ideas of body, flesh, and spirit – as the sum of human existence.

Soul.

Embodied.

Life.

**SLIDE 7.** This is how Ruth Haley Barton describes our souls: **“Your embodied soul is the ‘you’ that exists beyond any role that you may play, any job that you might perform, any relationship that seems to define you, or any notoriety or success you may have achieved. It is the part of you that longs for more of God than you have right now.”**

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my “nephesh” pants for you, my God.  
My “nephesh” thirsts for God, for the living God... (Ps. 42:1-2).*

It is who we are. Created by God to long for Him because only He satisfies.

Not in how I look in the mirror or what I possess or what others say about me.

Not in money or sex or power or resumes or branding or accomplishments or physical appearance or entertainment.

These may satisfy for a time – and then they are nothing – even worse – they are a lie!

So, our souls – our bodies - our lives - need tending to.

**SLIDE 8. *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?***  
(Ps. 43:5).

**SLIDE 9.** The Psalmist answers his own question: ***Put your hope in God; for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God*** (Ps. 43:6).

As embodied souls – we can be downcast – body to soul and soul to body.  
I know you know this because we have all experienced “downcast-ness.”

As ensouled bodies – we are hurt by being excluded, we are crushed by shame, sin and disconnection from God, we don’t tolerate well boredom or meaninglessness, and we struggle with the thought of nonexistence.

The good news is this: Christ is the way to wellness of soul.  
James Bryan Smith talks about this in his book, *The Good and Beautiful You*.

**SLIDE 10. “The good news is that the God who created our needy souls has, by grace, provided all that our souls will ever need. We cannot achieve or attain these things our souls need. They have to be given to us by God, as a gift. And God has provided all of these things in Jesus.”** James Bryan Smith

Here’s a partial list of these gifts...

I’m going to read them slowly and leave them on screen for a moment for you to meditate on them. Allow yourself – your soul – to connect with the truth of these statements. Let them act as healing or encouragement or both.

**SLIDE 11. In Christ...**

**I am wanted vs. excluded.**

**I am free from condemnation vs. shame.**

**I am restored to God vs. disconnected by my sin.**

**I am empowered to explore life and live with purpose vs. boredom and meaninglessness.**

**I am hidden and glorified vs. nonexistence in a time to come.**

Have you ever walked into a room and felt unwanted? You made the effort to be there, but no one made an effort to welcome you! Awkward! That is a pain we feel in our ensouled bodies.

Not with Christ!

The bible says: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

ALL are welcome into the family of faith.

Have you ever wondered if God could forgive all you've done or not done, said or not said that was misaligned with His good will, or why God bothers with you at all, or – like the Psalmist wondered - "What is man that you are mindful of him (Ps. 8:4)?"

We are the ones Jesus Christ died for to forgive us of our sins – once and for all time.

The bible says: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death* (Ro. 8:1-2).

Therefore, we need not feel shame for who we are - though we may (and should) feel guilt when we sin. If we have done something wrong – we should feel badly about it and want to repent and correct it.

The Spirit of God acting as the soul's dashboard - alerting us to our sin!

Have you ever been bored, restless? Our embodied souls are not built for this. We are born to be part of something meaningful, purposeful, explorative. We come alive in these contexts.

When we help someone change a tire on the side of the road. When we do anything good in partnership with God. When we do something we've never done before.

The bible says: *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Eph. 2:10).

We just need to look for it.

Can I tell you about a time I missed it?

I was driving along Fraser Hwy. on Thanksgiving Monday when I saw a homeless person on the road, bent down, struggling to pull something lodged in the wheel of their shopping cart. Cars were doing well to avoid hitting him.

I drove by on the opposite side of the Hwy.

I began to wonder if I should make a U turn to go back and help out. I even had a sense of God inviting me to do so. But I was tired and I just wanted to get home.

I think I missed an adventure there and then. No condemnation in it – just a little bit of regret.

I tell you that story because – I don't always get it right! And that's o.k.

Have you ever thought about death and dying – about no longer existing as you exist right here and now? It can be a fearful thought.

As embodied souls – we can't endure it.

The bible says: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory* (Col. 3:1-4).

In Christ – we will be raised from death to life just as Christ was raised from death to life. We can't see this now. It is hidden until Christ returns – when we will live with Him in glory.

This is a good thing to set our hearts and minds upon!

**SLIDE 12.** So, let's return to our original rhetorical question: ***What do you see when you look in the mirror?***

I hope – now – we would be able to say: **"I see a soul whose way to wellness is through Jesus Christ."**

This is who we are!

**SLIDE 13.**

**HELP = Prayer of Petition.**

**THANKS = Prayer of Gratitude.**

**WOW = something good that happened to you or your partner with God to do.**

Guidelines for Sharing: I would love to hear from anyone who has a prayer along any of these lines. This said – can I ask you to keep your sharing to a minute so that others could also have a chance?

And while we wait for our first prayer – I'd like to remind you of all the ways we pray for each other:

1. You can reach out to us in person. Just talk to me or Pastor Bryan and we'd love to pray for you or with you.
2. You can reach out by phone. Just call the office and we can sort with you who you'd like to be praying for you or with you.
3. You can reach out online – where dead center of our website homepage is a prayer tab. Click "My Prayer Request" and it will take you to a page where you can tell us who you are, what you like us to pray about, and the level of confidentiality, ie. Pastoral staff only, Prayer Team only, or churchwide (through our Staying Connected Newsletter).