BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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CARING for THE MOST IMPORTANT
PART of YOU

SESSION 1

WHAT IS The soul?

Our soul is like an inner stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other element of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom, including nature; and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, and the rest of human nature and nature at large.

DALLAS WILLARD, RENOVATION OF THE HEART

Welcome!

Welcome to Session 1 of *Soul Keeping*. Each of the six sessions in this study is designed to be completed in ninety minutes. If you have just one hour for your meeting, you will need to choose fewer questions for your discussion. You may also opt to devote two meetings rather than one to each session.

If this is your first time together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourselves to each other before watching the video. Then let's begin!

Video: What Is the Soul? (25 minutes)

Play the video segment for Session 1. As you watch, use the outline provided to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

The Parable of the Keeper of the Stream

Questions about the human soul:

What is it?

What does it consist of?

Why does it matter, if it does matter?

Is it doing okay?

All of us have an outer life and an inner life.

My outer life is the public, visible me—my accomplishments, my work, my reputation.

My inner life is largely invisible. It's where my secret thoughts, hopes, and wishes live.

"What matters most, what marks your existence, the really deep reason why human life matters so much, is because of this tiny, fragile, vulnerable, precious thing about you called your soul. You are not just a self; you are a soul. You are a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God, made to run on God. Which means that you are not made to be self-sufficient" (Dallas Willard).

The self is not the soul.

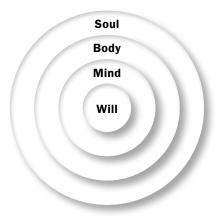
In the twentieth century, we replaced community, society, church, and faith with a tiny little unit that cannot bear the weight of meaning. We've replaced all these larger entities with the *self*.

The self is a stand-alone, do-it-yourself unit, while the soul reminds us we are not made for ourselves or by ourselves. The soul always exists before God.

Your soul connects your thoughts, your sensations, your emotions, your will, and integrates them into an entire being.

The four parts of a human being

Each part of a human being must be healthy and working as God intended it to, and that makes a healthy soul.



Will: The innermost circle is the will—the capacity to choose. The will is what makes you a person and not a thing. It is important but it is also extremely limited.

Mind: The second circle is the mind, a person's thoughts and feelings. "The mind of the sinful [person] is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6 NIV 1984).

Body: The third circle is the body.

"Our bodies are like our little power packs—we couldn't be us without them.... But they are not the whole story. We are not just the stuff that our bodies are made of" (Dallas Willard).

Soul: The final circle is the soul. The human soul is what integrates all of our different parts into a single person.

"A healthy soul is an integrated soul, and an unhealthy soul is a 'dis-integrated' one" (Dallas Willard).

When we're dealing with a disintegrated soul, we have to come to grips with sin.

What does it mean to lose one's soul?

"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

What Jesus is saying is a diagnostic expression. To lose my soul means I no longer have a healthy center that organizes and guides my life.

You have a soul, and for you to have a soul that is healed, that is healthy, that is redeemed by God, matters more than the outcome of any circumstance in your world or your life. Your eternal destiny rests on the well-being of your soul—and only God can heal the soul.

What does it mean to "keep" one's soul?

"You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.... Hurry is the great enemy of souls in our day. Being busy is mostly a condition of our outer world; it's having many things to do. Being hurried is a problem of the soul. It's being so preoccupied with myself and what myself has to do that I am no longer able to be fully present with God and others. There is no way a soul can thrive when it is hurried. And nobody will come along and unhurry your soul for you" (Dallas Willard).

You have one soul; and gaining the whole world will not help you if you lose it.

Caring for your soul, allowing it to flourish in God's presence and become a gift to the world around you, is the primary charge that faces you before eternity.

"This is the most important thing you can know about your identity: You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe" (Dallas Willard).

Your soul will live forever—and you are the keeper of your soul.

Group Discussion (63 minutes)

Take time to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

You Are the Keeper

- **2.** A keeper is someone who is in charge of caring for, maintaining, or protecting something. For example, there are innkeepers, zookeepers, bookkeepers, groundskeepers, housekeepers, peacekeepers, shopkeepers, gatekeepers, beekeepers, etc.
 - Along with the parable John told about the keeper of the stream, what do these images of keepers suggest about the tasks and characteristics of "keeping" in general? For example, the stream keeper's work was described as "unseen."

• What comes to mind when you think of these characteristics in connection with your soul? In other words, what might they reveal about what it means for you to engage in soul keeping?

Describing the Soul

- **3.** It can be hard to define the soul, but sometimes we have moments when we recognize it even if we can't define it. For example, John described feeling "an enormous combination of joy and humility and awe" when he watches a sunset at Big Sur, and how there is a depth to that experience that goes beyond what he can apprehend visually.
 - Think back over the last day or two. In what moments did you catch a glimpse of your soul at work? (If nothing comes to mind, think back to the most recent experience you can recall.)

 How, specifically, do you recognize your soul in these moments? In other words, what distinguishes these moments from other moments?

 Overall, would you say you tend to be more aware of your soul in uplifting experiences (such as the one John described) or in experiences of hardship and suffering? Share the reasons for your response.

4. The Bible doesn't provide a comprehensive definition of the soul, but the words biblical writers use offer insights about its meaning. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for the soul is *nephesh* (neh'fesh). New Testament writers use the Greek word *psyche* (psü-khā') to name the soul. The root words for both *nephesh* and *psyche* refer to "breath."

Nephesh can be translated in several ways, but it is commonly rendered *life* or *soul*. For example:

The ransom for a life [nephesh] is costly, no payment is ever enough. (Psalm 49:8)

Only take care, and keep your soul [nephesh] diligently. (Deuteronomy 4:9a ESV)

Psyche is also frequently translated as *life* or *soul*. We see both uses in this statement made by Jesus:

For whoever wants to save their life [psyche] will lose it, but whoever loses their life [psyche] for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul [psyche]? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul [psyche]? (Matthew 16:25 – 26)

In biblical usage, nephesh and psyche are words that encompass

all that makes a person a living being, "summing up ... the whole personality, of the whole self of a person." In essence, they are words that refer to your life as an integrated whole and all the components that make you uniquely *you*.

• Briefly reflect on the soul using the image of breath, the meaning of the biblical root words. For example, you might consider when you tend to be most and least aware of your physical breathing, what takes your breath away, or what makes you hold your breath. What parallels do you recognize between these physical experiences of breath and the ways in which you might experience, or fail to experience, your soul at work?

• The three Scriptures quoted above stress the incalculable value of the soul and the importance of making an intentional effort to care for it. And yet, as Dallas Willard acknowledged, even among Christians, "very few people [are] seriously concerned about the state of their own soul." Overall, how would you assess yourself in this regard? For example, would you say the attention and care you give to the state of your soul right now is the highest it's ever been, the lowest, or somewhere between? Share the reasons for your response.

Caring for the Soul

5. John described a distinction Dallas Willard made between being busy and being hurried:

Hurry is the great enemy of souls in our day. Being busy is mostly

^{1.} Colin Brown, "Soul," New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 3, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1986), 680.

^{2.} Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 208.

a condition of our outer world; it is having many things to do. Being hurried is a problem of the soul. It's being so preoccupied with myself and what myself has to do that I am no longer able to be fully present with God and fully present with you. There is no way a soul can thrive when it is hurried.

• How would you assess the threat level of hurry to your soul right now? Is it very high, moderate, or low?

• When are you most likely to succumb to hurry—to lose the ability to be fully present with God and others?

• If you were to describe the characteristics of a person who is busy but *not* hurried, what would they be? For example, what would you expect to notice about their demeanor, their actions, and their interactions with others?

6. John said that this was the most important thing he had to say:

You have a soul, and for you to have a soul that is healed, that is healthy, that is redeemed by God, matters more than the outcome of any circumstance in your world or your life. Your eternal destiny rests on the well-being of your soul—and only God can heal the soul.

In what ways might the next twenty-four hours be different if you were to take this statement seriously? For example, how might it influence the decisions you make, the way you spend your time, or the way you relate to others?

Souls in Community

7. In addition to learning about *Soul Keeping* together as a group, it's important to also be aware of how God is at work among you—especially in how you relate to each other and share your lives throughout the study. As you discuss the teaching in each session, there will be many opportunities to speak life-giving—and life-challenging—words, and to listen to one another deeply. Being with each other in this way doesn't happen by accident. Dallas Willard writes:

Persons rarely become present where they are not heartily wanted. Certainly that is true for you and me. We prefer to be wanted, warmly wanted, before we reveal our souls—or even come to a party.³

As you anticipate the next several weeks of learning together in community, what would help you to "become present" within the group? Use one or more of the sentence starters below, or your own statement, to help the group understand the best way to be a good companion to you throughout this study. As each person responds, use the two-page chart that follows to briefly note what is important to that person and how you can be a good companion to them.

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I feel "heartily wanted" in a group when . . .
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It really helps me to become present when . . .

I tend to withdraw or feel anxious when . . .

I'd like you to consistently challenge me about . . .

You can help me to take my soul seriously by . . .

In our discussions, the best thing you could do for me is . . .

^{3.} Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 77.

Name	The Best Way I Can Be a Good Companion to This Person
	1

Name	The Best Way I Can Be a Good Companion to This Person

Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 minutes)

Complete this activity on your own.

- 1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
- 2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session . . .

Group Practice: Attending to the Soul

Each session in the *Soul Keeping* study includes a group practice that each of you will complete on your own between sessions, then debrief together at the start of the next meeting. Although the practice is completed outside of the group gathering, it's a good idea to read through the practice description before concluding your meeting each week. In some cases, activities will require preparation or setting aside time each day to complete. As part of attending to the soul, it's important not to hurry or try to complete activities at the last minute.

The group practice for this week is to spend time each day attending to your soul. When we attend to something, we think about it, listen to it, watch it carefully. We are generous with full and thoughtful attention. The purpose of this practice is not to "do" or achieve anything but simply to become increasingly aware of your soul in the

course of everyday life. Here are two options for ways to attend to your soul between now and your next group meeting.

- Option 1: Set aside fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of each day to reflect on the previous twenty-four hours. In what two or three moments do you recognize your soul at work? For example, it might be an experience of beauty or connection to God; an experience of suffering; or a time when you felt an internal conflict (between your will, your mind, and/or your body). How specifically do you recognize your soul—rather than your "self"—in this experience? Briefly note your responses on a pad of paper or in a journal. At the end of the week, review your daily responses. What stands out most to you about the times you recognize your soul at work?
- Option 2: Each day, set a timer or an alert (on your watch, smartphone, laptop, etc.) for two or three intervals throughout the day. For example at 10:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., or perhaps around meal times. At each interval, allow five minutes to turn your attention to your soul. Ask, What does my soul need right now? How is it different from what my "self" thinks it needs right now? Note your responses with a brief line or two on a pad of paper or in a journal (or email them to yourself). At the end of the week, review your daily notes. What stands out most to you about what your soul routinely needs or about the differences between the needs of your soul and the needs of your self?

With either option, you may find it helpful to first review the Session 1 personal study, which includes additional information about the four dimensions of the person—the will, the mind, the body, and the soul.

Bring your notes from the week to the next group gathering. You'll have a chance to talk about your experiences and observations at the beginning of the Session 2 discussion.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

SESSION 1: Personal Study

Read and Learn

Read the prologue, introduction, and chapters 1-2 of the book *Soul Keeping*. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.

Study and Reflect

Your soul is what integrates your will (your intentions), your mind (your thoughts and feelings, your values and conscience), and your body (your face, body language, and actions) into a single life. A soul is healthy—well-ordered—when there is harmony between these three entities and God's intent for all creation. When you are connected with God and other people in life, you have a healthy soul.

Soul Keeping, page 39

1. It is very important to understand the "parts" of the inner life. In order to care for the soul, we have to understand what it is made of and how it works. The pages that follow provide an overview of the four parts or dimensions of the human being: the *will*, the *mind*, the *body*, and the *soul*. For each dimension, there is a brief definition and a chart that describes what that dimension looks like when it is disintegrated (unhealthy) and integrated (healthy). Read through the definition and the chart for each dimension, underlining any words or phrases that stand out to you. Then use the chart as a reference in responding to the corresponding sentence starters.

^{4.} Definitions and content in the four charts is adapted from *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard and *Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg.

The Will

The function of the will is to organize our life as a whole, and to organize it around God. The will includes our intentions, choices, decisions, and character. It is our will that has the power to do what is good or evil. We exercise the will primarily in the power to select what we think on and how intently we will focus on it—from which our other decisions and actions then more or less directly flow.

I recognize the *disintegration* of my will in these ways (specific habits, thoughts/feelings, reactions, experiences, choices, relationships, etc.) ...

I recognize the integration of my will in these ways ...

Characteristics of the Disintegrated Will

- The constant character of the will apart from God is chaotic duplicity and confusion. It wills many things and they cannot be reconciled with each other.
- We are enslaved to our own selfconflicted will.
- Our will is organized around feelings or desires rather than God.
- Our will is shrouded in layer upon layer of destructive habits.
- Our drive toward good is splintered, corrupted, and eventually turned against ourselves.
- The key question is: "How can I get my way?"
- We routinely engage in manipulation, deception, seduction, malice, and exaltation of self.
- Deception pretending to feel and think one way while acting another — is often self-deception.

Characteristics of the Integrated Will

- The character of the healthy will is a single-minded and joyous devotion to God and his will, to what God wants for us—and to service to him and to others because of him.
- The will is not at war with itself and is capable of directing all of the parts of the self in harmony with one another under the direction of God.
- The key question is: "What good can I bring about?"
- We reach out to God in trust.
- We place our confidence entirely in God and surrender to God's supremacy in all things.
- Our lives and interactions are routinely characterized by transparency, sincerity, goodwill, submission, and service to God.
- We are abandoned to God and content with the will of God.
- We do not hesitate to do what is right.

The Mind

The mind includes our thoughts, memories, ideas, feelings, values, desires, conscience, reasoning, perceptions, beliefs, and imagination, etc. The power we have over our thoughts assists us in directing and controlling our feelings, which are not directly under the guidance of our will.

I recognize the *disintegration* of my mind in these ways (specific habits, thoughts/feelings, reactions, experiences, choices, relationships, etc.) . . .

I recognize the integration of my mind in these ways ...

Characteristics of the Disintegrated Mind

- The mind apart from God becomes a wild mix of thought and feeling manifested in willful stupidities, blatant inconsistencies, and confusions.
- We equate God with our limited ideas about God, and so fail to know what God is really like and what his law requires (Hosea 4:6).
- We actively crowd God out of our thoughts, and the mind is trapped by destructive ideas and images about both God and ourselves.
- We are mastered and enslaved by feelings and believe our feelings must be satisfied. The mind is set on the flesh, which is death (Romans 8:6).
- We cannot distinguish between our feelings and our will.
- We lack self-control, which turns life into a mere drift.
- We cannot envision who we would be without the fears, angers, lusts, power ploys, and woundedness with which we have lived so long. We identify with our habit-worn feelings.
- We are obsessed with and blinded by negative thoughts and feelings.

Characteristics of the Integrated Mind

- The healthy mind is being constantly transformed and renewed (Romans 12:2). It is increasingly characterized by hope, faith, love, joy, and peace.
- We desire to be conformed to the mind of Christ, and move toward a total exchange of our own ideas and images for his.
- We apply our mind to truth by consistently taking in the Word of God, dwelling on it, pondering its meaning, and exploring its implications for our lives.
- We fill our mind with thoughts of truth and beauty, desiring what is wholesome and good.
- We know and accept the fact that our feelings do not have to be satisfied.
- We have a compelling vision of ourselves as becoming free from our besetting sins. We are open to radical change in ourselves, to careful and creative instruction, and to divine grace.
- We exhibit self-control and can accomplish what we have decided to do and be, even when we "don't feel like it."
- We have learned to reason with, be critical of, and have some distance from our thoughts and feelings.

The Body

The body is our primary energy source and the focal point of our presence in the physical and social world. It includes our facial expressions, body language, actions, and interactions with the world around us. The body is the original and primary place of our dominion and our responsibility. In union with it, we come into existence and become the person we will forever be.

I recognize the *disintegration* of my body in these ways (specific habits, thoughts/feelings, reactions, experiences, choices, relationships, etc.) ...

I recognize the integration of my body in these ways ...

Characteristics of the Disintegrated Body

- The body becomes a primary barrier to conformity to Christ and hinders us from doing what we know to be good and right.
- The role of the body is distorted as it becomes a primary source of gratification and instrument for getting what we want. This results in "death" and alienation from God (Galatians 6:8).
- Taking the body as a main concern makes it impossible to please God and at the same time ensures the utter futility of our life (Romans 8:5-7).
- We become a slave to our appetites (Romans 16:18). The body is idolized, worshiped, and misused.
- The body is a source of fear, shame, disgust, agitation, anger, and self-loathing.
- Bodily pleasure is exalted to a necessity and we become dependent on it.
- The body acts wrongly "before we think," and in opposition to the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).
- Parts of the body feel beyond our control and engage in sins of their own: a lying tongue, haughty eyes, hands that shed innocent blood, feet that rush to do evil (Proverbs 6:17-18).

Characteristics of the Integrated Body

- The body becomes our primary ally in Christlikeness and a showplace of God's greatness (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).
- We release the body to God's care and no longer idolize, worship, or misuse it.
- The body is properly honored, cared for, and regarded as holy because it is inhabited by God (Romans 8:11).
- The body is increasingly able to do the things that Jesus did and taught (Romans 8:4).
- The body becomes the easy servant of the integrated mind and will.
- The body is filled with appetites that serve the good and with habits that lead to excellent living.
- The body becomes a "[slave] to righteousness leading to holiness" (Romans 6:19).
- We take responsibility to care for our body, but view the body as God's to do with as he pleases (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Soul

The soul is that dimension of the person that interrelates all of the other dimensions so that they form one life. The soul is the most basic level of life in the individual, and one that is by nature rooted in God. It is also the deepest part of the person and has the capacity to operate without conscious supervision.

I recognize the *disintegration* of my soul in these ways (specific habits, thoughts/feelings, reactions, experiences, choices, relationships, etc.) ...

I recognize the integration of my soul in these ways ...

Characteristics of the Disintegrated Soul

- The soul apart from God mistakes itself for God. As a result, everything becomes delusional.
- We are dead in trespasses and sins, enslaved to desires or bodily habits, or blinded by false ideas, distorted images, and misinformation.
- We are displaced and disoriented. We do not know where we are or how to get where we want to go.
- We are locked in a selfdestructive struggle with ourselves and with all those around us.
- Our habitual condition is one of conflict and of acting other than how we ourselves intend or regard as wise.
- Our inner condition makes it impossible for us to deal with the demands of life. We cannot "get it all together."
- Performance is at a premium because life lacks meaning.
- Sin and disobedience make it impossible for our soul to rest. Sinful desires war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11).
- We struggle with life on our own.

Characteristics of the Integrated Soul

- The healthy soul is one in which all the essential parts of the human being are organized around God, as they are restored and sustained by him. This is what it means to be fully integrated under God.
- We embrace an overall, settled condition of life in the kingdom of God described as death to self (Matthew 16:24–25).
- We are prepared for and capable of responding to the situations of life in ways that are good and right.
- Whatever the circumstances, we are enabled by Christ to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7). We abandon outcomes to God.
- We do not have to look out for ourselves because God is in charge of our life.
- We live in pursuit of knowing Jesus Christ and are caught up in what he is doing (2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:10).
- We seek to do everything in Jesus' name, knowing that what we do counts for eternity and is preserved there (Colossians 3:17).

2. Based on your responses to question 1, which number on the continuums below would you say best describes the degree to which you are experiencing integration or disintegration in the four dimensions of your life? Circle your response.

	My Will												
1 My wil disinte (unhea	egrated	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 My will is integrated (healthy).				
				My N	lind								
1 My mi disinte (unhea	egrated	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 My mind is integrated (healthy).				
				Му В	ody								
1 My bod disinte (unhea	egrated	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 My body is integrated (healthy).				
				My S	oul								
1 My sor disinte (unhea	egrated	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 My soul is integrated (healthy).				

The very first thing that we must do is to be mindful of our soul, to acknowledge it.... Once we clearly acknowledge the soul, we can learn to hear its cries.

Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, pages 207, 209

3. For many reasons, most of us find it difficult to truly attend to the soul—to acknowledge it and to give it the care it requires. The soul is quiet but also resilient, and it longs to be heard.

I have been waiting.

I am shy—terribly shy—even in the most boisterous person. I can only whisper, never shout. You may never even notice me.

But I am here, waiting.

I do not lie on the surface. If you look and listen, patiently, you will know.

I speak through your confusion, through your wanting, through your hurt. When you stammer, when you say what you did not mean to say, it was I. When you watch a sunset, or hear a child laugh, or listen to a piece of music that causes you to suddenly become choked up, it is I that causes your eyes to fill. When you are addicted, it is I that is chained.

When the sun burns up and the universe melts away, I will be here. Like Glenn Close in the movie Fatal Attraction, I will not be ignored. I can be wounded, lost, repulsed, or redeemed. Your circumstances actually matter far less to your happiness than you think. It is my health that makes your life heaven or hell.

I am your soul. I am here.⁵

If this were your soul speaking to you, how would you respond? What would you want your soul to know?

^{5.} Soul Keeping, pages 56-57.

4. Dallas Willard writes that "the indispensable first step in caring for the soul is to place it under God." Read Psalm 24, which describes a soul completely at rest in God's care. Drawing on the psalm as a reference, use the space below to write your own prayer. Acknowledge the areas of your life where you are struggling with disintegration. Ask God to help you begin to recognize and attend to your soul. Place your soul under God by naming the ways in which you are surrendering yourself to his care.

^{6.} Dallas Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 208.