

“THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS”

“Cultivate Your Soul”

Scripture Reading – Psalms, 42:1–43:5

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”. These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon – from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”. My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

‘Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell”.’

Matthew, 10:28, NIV

This series is based on the book ‘THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

Shortly after his seventieth birthday, Selwyn Hughes sat down to compile a list of the truths the LORD had taught him as he walked with Christ for more than half a century. This original list contained between forty to fifty issues which he felt could be passed on to the Christians of

tomorrow. In asking what was ‘absolutely essential to living an effective and successful Christian life’, the writer whittled them down to an irreducible minimum of seven.

Selwyn Hughes decided to call these seven key concepts ‘LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

However, this is not a call to legalism but a call to engage with the spiritual laws God has built into his Kingdom, which in turn enable us to experience more of his power and his presence.

Let the Holy Spirit unfold for you the basic laws that govern all spiritual success...

“CULTIVATE YOUR SOUL”

‘The cultivation of the soul is the seventh law for spiritual success... If the worship of God is the first law of the soul, then most certainly the cultivation of it is an important law also. If it is not cultivated then it will degenerate and die. When the soul is neglected, we experience all kinds of problems. By caring for our soul, we can find relief from distress and discover deep satisfaction and pleasure in life. It is in the quiet time – that powerful time – when the soul grows best.’

Selwyn Hughes

Success often comes when both God and man team up together.

Though God is the one who designed the soul, it requires care and husbandry on the part of the human being who possesses it, if it is to grow and develop in the way it should.

‘A man was showing his friend around his beautiful garden on which he had lavished years of careful attention. Once it had been a wilderness with no shape or colour but years of hard work had turned it into a place of delight. “This is indeed a beautiful garden”, the friend remarked, “I do not think I have ever seen such order and loveliness. God most certainly is to be praised for such handiwork”. The owner of the garden hesitated for a moment then said, “Yes, God most certainly should be praised. But you should have seen it when he had it all to himself”.’

Consider what happens when we neglect gardening for even a short while.

‘I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.’

Proverbs, 24:30-32, NIV

These words could well describe the condition of someone who has neglected to cultivate their soul. Left to itself, without proper care and attention, the soul soon becomes like a garden overgrown with weeds.

‘Everyone should know that you can not live in any other way than by cultivating the soul.’

Thomas Moore

1. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The word 'SOUL' appears in Scripture about 130 times.

Unfortunately, the writers of the Bible did not give it a precise technical definition. However, it appears to bear the meaning of one's life and personality.

Obviously the soul is not something tangible like a hand or a foot. It cannot be weighed, seen, or analysed in a laboratory. The dictionary defines the 'SOUL' as: 'THE IMMORTAL, SPIRITUAL PART OF A PERSON WHICH CONTAINS THE MORAL, EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL NATURE'.

'SOUL' is an old English word 'SAWOL' which comes from a prehistoric Germanic word 'SEELE'.

WHAT IS MY SOUL?

DICTIONARY *'the non-physical aspect of a person in which is found the complex human attitudes that manifest as consciousness, thought, feeling, and will.'*

THESAURUS *'character, core, emotions, essence, feelings, heart, personality, spirit.'*

SAYINGS

"Her soul was in turmoil" has to do with our feelings.

"Though technically perfect, the drawing lacked soul" has to do with spiritual depth.

"I hope to discover the soul of the Russian people" has to do with character.

"He was the soul of discretion" has to do with being a perfect example.

"Sell your soul" means to abandon your principles to gain wealth or success.

You cannot really understand the soul, it is a mystery.

It is not meant to be understood, but entered into. When we turn to the Bible and ask ourselves the question, 'WHAT IS THE SOUL?' we get the best answers. Although there are many connotations to the word, it appears to have two distinct meanings – LIFE and PERSONALITY. Think of your soul as the core of your inner life and personality. And it is immortal, says Scripture. Our soul will live on for ever in either hell or heaven, depending on our relationship to Jesus Christ, and the choices that we have made about the salvation he offers freely to us.

'We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.'

The Salvation Army, Articles of Faith, Doctrine 11

The soul is simply the hollow somewhere deep inside us which God fills.

The soul in its highest sense is a vast capacity for God.

'The soul is like a curious chamber added on to being, and somehow involving being, a chamber with elastic and contractile walls which can be expanded with God as its guest, illimitably but which without God shrinks and shrivels until every vestige of the Divine is gone and God's image is left without God's spirit. One cannot call what is left a soul; it is a shrunken useless organ, a capacity sentenced to death by a disease which drops as a withered hand by the side, and cumbrous nature like a rotted branch. Life has its revenge upon neglect as well as upon extravagance. Misuse is a moral sin as abuse.'

"NATURAL LAW IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD", Henry Drummond

2. THE DEGENERATION OF THE SOUL

The soul fits into the Kingdom of God like a hand fits inside a glove.

The soul was made BY GOD, and FOR GOD, and will not reach its highest potential until it is at home WITH GOD. But our souls have been infected and afflicted with a disease called sin. What God formed, sin has deformed. This is the tragic consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

Because of the Fall of Mankind, our souls contain a degenerative disease.

'We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence but, by their disobedience, they lost their purity and happiness; and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.'

The Salvation Army, Articles of Faith, Doctrine 5

Millions of people have been reading about Lord Voldemort's soul.

In her novels, Joanne Rowling has weaved a story which explains how 'HE WHO MUST NOT BE NAMED' has committed such terrible acts that his soul has been split into eight pieces. In the final book, Harry Potter and his friends must destroy each piece of the Dark Wizard's soul before Lord Voldemort can be finally defeated. Voldemort's soul is described for us in the book (page 566):

'[Harry] recoiled. He had spotted the thing that was making the noises. It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering... where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath. He was afraid of it. Small and fragile and wounded though it was, he did not want to approach it... He ought to comfort it, but it repulsed him.'

"HARRY POTTER & THE DEATHLY HALLOWS", J K Rowling

Left to itself and without the salvation that comes through Christ, the soul will die.

'We should realise that a man can cause his own soul to perish through negligence. Man is prone to neglect and to procrastination and they are among the enemies of the soul. It would be wonderful indeed if everything in our world could be geared to the salvation of men's souls, but everything is geared in just the opposite direction. Fallen nature is no friend of God. Fallen nature is no friend of God's grace. The winds that blow through the corridors of this world do not blow heaven-ward; they blow hell-ward. The man with no place of stability or anchorage goes to the way the wind blows. Nevertheless, you have a soul to save, and a God to glorify.'

Aiden W Tozer

"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die."

Ezekiel, 18:4, NIV

'Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell".'

Matthew, 10:28, NIV

The principle of degeneration can be seen everywhere in nature.

Plant a garden with roses and strawberries, leave it to itself for a few years and in the process of time it will run to waste. If we neglect our body, it will rapidly deteriorate. If we neglect our muscles, they will waste away. If we neglect our mind, it will degenerate into imbecility. If we neglect our conscience, it will run off into lawlessness and vice.

'We are wont to imagine that nature is full of life. In reality it is full of death. One cannot say it is natural for a plant to live. Examine its nature fully and you have to admit that its natural tendency is to die. It is kept from dying by a mere temporary endowment which gives it power to utilise for a brief span, the rain, the sunshine and the air. Withdraw this temporary endowment for a moment and its true nature is revealed. Instead of overcoming nature it is overcome. The very things which appeared to minister to its growth and beauty now turn against it and make it decay and die. The sun which warmed it, withers it; the air and rain which nourished it, rots it... It is the very forces which we associate with life which, when their true nature appears, are discovered to be really the ministers of death.'

"NATURAL LAW IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD", Henry Drummond

3. THE CULTIVATION OF THE SOUL

'To counteract this law of degeneration, God has introduced another law – the law of cultivation, which will stop the downward drift in the soul and make it work the other way.'

Selwyn Hughes

Simply put, the soul is renewed in daily contact with God.

Neglect this contact and the result will be emptiness of the soul. The soul needs time with God if it is to truly develop and even grow. Those Christians who say they are too busy to spend time with God in bible study, prayer, and meditation will find that this neglect of the soul will have serious repercussions in their lives.

YOU CULTIVATE YOUR SOUL DURING QUIET TIMES WITH GOD

'The real problem of the Christian life comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning is shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.'

"MERE CHRISTIANITY", Clive S Lewis

If you are too busy to spend time with God and refresh your soul then you are far busier than you really ought to be.

'Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest".'

Mark, 6:31, NIV

YOU CULTIVATE YOUR SOUL BY MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.'

Psalms, 119:105, NIV

It must be remembered that the Bible is God's one and only published work.

Whatever degree of inspiration we attach to other Christian writings, the Bible alone is unique. It is the only book that truly records the thoughts and actions of Almighty God in his dealings with his chosen people. It alone faithfully records the means of salvation – the incarnation, life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

'To be ignorant of Scripture is not to know Christ.'

St Jerome

YOU CULTIVATE YOUR SOUL BY PRAYING TO GOD'S THRONE

'Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.'

Ephesians, 6:18, NIV

You need to learn to pray somewhere before you can always keep on praying.

If you are to 'ALWAYS KEEP ON PRAYING' there must be specific times for the cultivation of such a spirit of continuous prayer. You cannot pray everywhere unless you first learn to pray somewhere. You cannot maintain the spirit of prayer unless you make a specific time or times for prayer.

'Prayer is the most important thing in my life. If I should neglect prayer for a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.'

Martin Luther

YOU CULTIVATE YOUR SOUL BY LISTENING TO GOD'S VOICE

'Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me".'

John, 10:27, NIV

'The soul that waits in silence must learn to disentangle the voice of God from the net of other voices – the ghostly whisperings of the subconscious, the luring voices of the world, the hindering voices of misguided friendship, the clamour for personal ambition and vanity, the murmur of self-will, the song of unbridled imagination, the thrilling note of religious romance. To learn to keep one's ear true in so subtle a labyrinth of spiritual sound is indeed at once great adventure and education. One hour of listening may give us deeper insight... and surer instinct for divine values than a year's hard study.'

"CREATIVE PRAYER", Emily Herman

What does God's voice sound like?

To some it is a gentle impression... to others a verse of Scripture... to some it is being conscious of one's own thoughts coinciding with a sense of God's presence. Being shut in with God often leads to us hearing his voice. It is the place the soul grows best.

Let the Holy Spirit unfold for you the basic laws that govern all spiritual success!