

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JULY 19, 2020

“IT’S ALL ABOUT SOUL”

Song of Focus

The Depth of Soul

Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. Folks at his job all so love Ben.
From nine to five, he pitches pitch in.
But they don't see the time he spends
just helping teens from eight to ten.
2. Ben's sister, Gwen, has lots of friends.
She lifts them up with the cards she sends.
She still has time to watch her daughter's twins;
fills lonely nights praying for them.

Refrain

Lives are so much more than we think and know,
what they do or where they go.
The best of friends only know a part
of the depth of soul or the size of heart.

3. Gwen's best friend lives in St. John,
and she owns a beauty spa and salon.
But all the accounts are overdrawn.
she needs the money for her ailing mom.

Refrain

Lives are so much more than we think and know,
What they do or where they go.
The best of friends only know a part
of the depth of soul or the size of heart.

The Scripture

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in

heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The Message
It's All About Soul: Identity
Mark Briley

Synopsis: “Who are you?” is the question we answer in any number of ways. Some describe their careers. Others describe their role in the family. Others talk about their “alumni” status. In this search for identity, we hardly ever describe our soul. When it comes right down to it, however, the soul holds together all of who we are.

“For you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”
(1 Peter 1:9)



Maybe you’ve been in a circle of people talking, debating, arguing even, over a subject matter of any kind – take your pick – when someone finally gets fed up and asks the rhetorical question: “*Do you even have a soul?*” Now... this conversation is had in any circle you can imagine. Republican. Democrat. Evangelical. Mainline. Atheist. Catholic. Muslim. Liberal. Conservative. Urban. Rural. Old. Young. “*Do you even have a soul?*”

It’s sort of like the guy who walks around at the gym who’s mostly spending his time fiddling with his podcast, getting frequent drinks at the fountain, wrapping a towel around his neck and walking around the machines but never actually using them. The

line, apparently, of those gym insiders to that guy is, “*Do you even lift, bro?*” It’s different but it cuts to the core all the same.

“*Do you even have a soul?*” is the question people ask when one seems devoid of any sort of moral compass or grounded center upon which they muster some level of compassion for others; some sense that they are connected to a greater good of some kind. Whether someone is religious or not, they seem to make reference to the soul as that mysterious part of a person’s being that exudes a deep passion.

When we see a tireless athlete press herself beyond the normal sense of human limit, we say, “*She’s got heart.*” She has a beating organ protected by her rib cage, yes, but we’re saying, she’s got that extra oomph, that grit, that dig-to-the-next-level determination. The soul is even a deeper level than that. It’s an otherworldly part of who we are. And because we can’t touch it, see it, smell it, or dissect it, we just sort of pass over it and attempt to deal with the tangibles. Like what? Well...

As mysterious as it can be, we know a lot about our bodies. The pigmentation of our skin is front and center in the news. We’re fighting fast for a vaccine to COVID-19 to ensure our bodies are immune. We discuss the latest trends in the diet and exercise practices of Missourians. There’s something very tangible about the body.

As mysterious as it can be, we know a lot about our minds, too. We study the challenges of mental illness, monitor brain activity, and measure serotonin levels. We isolate lobes of the brain and study their particular function. We know a lot about how the mind operates.

The soul, however, lives full-time in the realm of mystery. What do we really know about the soul? Why does it matter? One has said that, “*The soul is that aspect of your whole being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything going on in the various dimensions of the self...*” as if the soul is the glue that holds the rest of you together.

Jesus cared deeply about the soul, saying, “*What’s the value of gaining the whole world if you lose your soul in the process?*” Whoa. What does he mean? Lots to unpack there.

Influential to the Civil Rights movement was music that came simply to be known as “*Soul.*” Billy Joel went as far as saying, “*It’s **All** About Soul.*” Maybe it’s time to dive into the deep end of our lives as we live into a summer of soul here at Broadway.

Maybe we start with the great debate. Are we a body with a soul or a soul with a body? I wonder what you think about that... *if* you’ve thought about that at all. Are we mostly just fleshy blobs moving around the earth, mowing yards, running marathons,

and doing the *Cha Cha Slide* at wedding receptions? (Do you remember wedding receptions?) I get to giggling when I'm out and about somewhere, because whether it's my own teenager or somebody else's, they seem to have these occasional bodily responses to seemingly nothing. They bust into 15 seconds of dance moves with no music playing and no expression on their faces. It's a bodily reflex, I guess. Just a living *TikTok* organism triggered by their own memories of the technological phenomenon. There must be something within each of us that is driving this fleshy vessel of ours. It's beyond the flesh. It's beyond the mind. It's that piece of you that integrates all the rest and makes you, you. And we're going to call that, "soul." We're wondering today... can your soul be the source of your greatest identity? "*Who am I?*" may be the biggest question we ever seek to answer. We jump to answers like, "*I'm an accountant,*" or "*I play this role in my family,*" or "*I'm a Mizzou Alum.*" We seldom, if ever, try to describe our soul.

Peter, as we engage his First Epistle today, catches me with an early line. He says, "*We've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for...*" It's an excitable "*Rah, Rah!*" speech you could say. I could see his readers getting psyched up, and heading out of the house, slapping their hand on the sign above the door that says, "*Play like a champion today!*" "*You've got a brand new life,*" he says, "*with everything to live for.*" It's a great spirit to start your day with.

Shane Claiborne of the *Simple Way* has a sign above their door to the world that says, "*Today – small things with great love or don't open the door.*" (It is another take on one of his mentors, Mother Theresa that said, "*Do small things with great love.*" The first indicator that we are a soul with a body and not the other way around is this: *intentionality*. An awakened soul is that part of you that gives your life intentionality. A sleepy soul doesn't push the body. You just go through the motions. An awakened soul says, "*You've got a brand-new life... small things with great love... play like a champion.*" And, of course, you've then got to decide what you'll do with your focused soul.

Carey Nieuwhof,¹ lawyer turned pastor and leadership guru says to get your soul focused, you have to work twice as hard on your *character* as you do on your *competency*. This is a responsibility we have to take on. No one else can do it for us. Progress begins with utter self-honesty about where we're coming up short. "*You can blame your team, your board, your spouse, your kids, the economy, your profession, or even gravity,*" Nieuwhof says, "*but none of that is going to reshape your character. If you change everything in your life except your character, you still won't be the kind of person you want to be. You can change jobs. You can change careers. You can change cities. You can change spouses. But none of that changes you.*"

¹ Any information shared in this message attributed to Carey Nieuwhof comes from his book, "*Didn't See it Coming.*" WaterBrook (a division of Penguin Random House, LLC. New York). 2018.

One of his suggestions in this quest for honest soul identity is to make your talk match your walk. Research shows that the average person hears as many as 200 lies a day and that *"60% of people lie during a typical 10-minute conversation and... average two to three lies during that short timeframe."*

Whenever there's a gap between who you are and who you want to be, your words drift toward exaggeration and embellishment. And then this insight. He says, *"Let me tell you what happens when you are relentlessly committed to making sure your talk matches your walk: you change your walk. Every time I line up my public talk to match my private walk, it makes my private walk better."*

If I want to speak a better story, I've got to commit to living a better story. And that's focused work building integrity and character. Competency may get you in the room. Character will keep you in the room.

This isn't easy work, of course. But Peter says it's worth it. *"Even though you're struggling through a hard time now,"* he says, you can decide what happens from here. You can't decide all the outcomes, necessarily, but the process... the only part that builds your character... is something you can choose. When the going gets tough, you can retreat, bail, quit, or you can be open to the opportunity of growing from this point forward. Peter calls this the refiner's fire. That sounds very serious.

The freedom of finding the true identity of your soul always seems to come with the wrestling. Jacob wrestled with the angel in a van down by the Jabok River. He walked away from that moment with a permanent limp but, more importantly to him, he walks away with the blessing of knowing who he was. Paul says to the Romans, *"suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character produces hope... and hope does not disappoint us."*

The journey can get rough, but the gift of discovering your soul identity – what you're truly made of at the core of your being is the only, ultimate peace one can find. The soul work of character regeneration is far reaching and is at the heart of what Christians often call spiritual maturity. Jesus had a very different end in mind for the spiritually mature. He didn't define maturity by how much you know or what you did. He defined it by how much you love. Working on your character twice as hard as you do on your competency will lead you into the place where God's love regenerates everything about you.

Treat yourself like Nifong Blvd. and never stop working on yourself no matter how inconvenient it is for everyone else. Someone clearly putting in the soul work is always inspiring. And one of the most fulfilling things you'll discover when you do this wrestling soul work is that the people closest to you will become the people most

grateful for you. That's how you'll begin to know you're living out of the groundedness of your soul and not the pursuits of the flesh.

Peter's encouragement to those receiving his correspondence is to hang in there. That's a word we have been offering often lately. Peter had the extraordinary experience of walking close to Jesus – seeing him move and teach, serve, and love. He watched Jesus call out the most powerful and smartest people with truth in a way that could not be argued. Peter also saw Jesus kneel next to a person everybody else would run from and watched him care for that person like he would his own mother. Peter saw Jesus arrested and the flash of the camera when the authorities took his mug shot. Peter, out of breath, examined the tomb where Jesus' dead body was supposed to reside, but there was just a pile of his clothes on the floor like a six-year-old boy who bails out of his play clothes in one lump on the floor and runs on to the next thing. Peter saw Jesus after that – once dead, now alive – and Jesus gave him a cool nickname (*The Rock...* can you dig it?!). Jesus also gave Peter the keys to the company car. Peter's had an experience with Jesus. Those reading Peter's words... people who had none of that experience with Jesus, but were now being persecuted for believing in him needed a reminder of why it's all worth it... why having a grounded soul matters. "*You've not seen Jesus,*" Pete says, "*but you love him. You don't see him, but you believe in him...*" and to what end? Peter answers: "*the freedom of your souls.*"

We are starving for that soul freedom... to be known for the essence of who we are, unmasked of all the things we try to portray in our lives as the things that matter. Many of us don't know we're starving for that soul freedom. We think we're starving for success or money or excitement – you can fill in your own blank. But here's the problem. Even if we satisfy any of those cravings, we still wind up hungry. Perhaps, it's because we've left untouched the most ancient and aching need of all – the one stitched into the fabric of our souls: to know and love a transcendent God and to be known by a transcendent God. We may struggle to manifest that longing on a practical level. But you know if you're being intentional about that quest or not. There's a moment in your life when you finally decide to do that thing you know you were meant to be doing. Maybe that moment is now.

I know it's hard... you're sitting in a lawn chair on a sweltering hot day in the middle of a pandemic... and you're wondering, "*How did we get here?*" and... you're distracted by that conversation you had on the way into church... and you've needed to get that one routine back on track and you're feeling guilty that you ate cookie dough for breakfast and you finally shake your head and deeply exhale wondering, "*Does any of this really matter? What's the point?*"

Sometimes you've got to be intentional about getting out of the bubble you are in if you're going to free your soul. If you don't get to a beautiful place every once in a

while, you get to thinking that everything is urban, as though when God made creation, God just made some medium-size buildings, a bowling alley, and a handful of round-a-bouts. Get out... listen... let your soul breathe... or wrestle creekside with God until you find the center of some soul blessing. Maybe you need some new conversation partners so your soul can grow beyond where it is.. Somebody or somebodies who aren't in it for the judging ... you can always find a judgy circle that will confirm your biases about face masks, or about black lives matter most, and if half-a-billion dollars for Patrick Mahomes is worth the cash. Finding your soul is not about fitting in, it is about belonging as you explore the greatest challenges love demands.

In a recent ZOOM @ Noon conversation – one we have every Monday at NOON to engage a thought, a topic, to see faces and pray together – we invited Dr. Brene Brown's voice into the conversation as she spoke to the difference between fitting in and belonging. She says, *"Stop walking through the world looking for confirmation that you don't belong. You will always find it because you've made that your mission. Stop scouring people's faces for evidence that you're not enough. You will always find it because you've made that your goal. True belonging and self-worth are not goods; we don't negotiate their value with the world. The truth about who we are lives in our hearts/[soul]. Our call to courage is to protect our wild heart against constant evaluation, especially our own. No one belongs here more than you."*²

In her research, Dr. Brown interviewed eighth graders all across the country and asked them to come up with the differences between fitting in and belonging. Their answers floored her:

- ***Belonging is being somewhere you want to be, and they want you. Fitting in is being somewhere you want to be, but they don't care one way or the other.***
- ***Belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else.***
- ***If I get to be me, I belong. If I have to be like you, I fit in.***

Eighth grade. Did you feel the angst, the turn, even the longing cry? Fitting in is a surface thing... wearing the right clothes, having the same bumper sticker, posting the same political memes. Belonging is a soul thing. Belonging is wrapped up in our truest identity... that place where you don't care about my bad COVID haircut and you know that we're not all the same and that is actually a beautiful thing... not a negative. It's not about the statement, *"I don't see color,"* when it comes to the color of a person's skin. Instead it's *"I see your beautiful color, honor it and wonder what it has meant for your sense of belonging... how has it shaped your soul? Let me hear your*

² Dr. Brene Brown's *"Braving the Wilderness"* shares this quote as well as the bullet points from her interview with Eighth graders. Random House Publishing. New York. 2017. Chapter 6.

story.” Belonging is a vulnerable process. It takes willingness on your part and that of others... but it’s so worth it. It’s the way we find a home in our deepest identity.

Do you even have a soul? That was the question we started with. Yes, you do. Peter says it can be free. And it longs to be free. Whether you’re in eighth grade or you’re 108, I hope you know your soul belongs in this world. And my hope? That you can claim that most honest part of you, that place where your deepest “Yes!” resides... your soul... as your identity. It is only in and from that place that you can truly know and truly be known. Billy Joel must be right... it’s all about soul.

Thanks be to God.