

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JULY 26, 2020

“IT’S ALL ABOUT SOUL”

Sermon Song

Nourish This Empty Soul

Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. I read in Genesis, how your glorious creation
was somehow incomplete, not yet entirely whole.
The first human formed from dust, still unmet potential,
received from you the breath of life, became a living soul.
2. And now I bow before you, God, a partial creation,
praying, “Fill me, Holy Spirit, make my spirit whole!”
I am asking, Lord, praying please fill this empty vessel
and breathe in your breath of life. Create a living soul!

Refrain:

Breathe into me the breath of life, O Lord of all creation.
I have been an actor playing a scripted role.
I’m starving in my spirit, hungering, and thirsting!
Nourish, my God, this empty soul.

3. Why do I spend my money for that which is not bread,
hanging out in places my spirit cannot grow?
Why do I toil and labor, all for empty wages?
I hear you say, “Come my, child. Come, let me fill your soul.”

Refrain

Breathe into me the breath of life, O Lord of all creation.
I have been an actor playing a scripted role.
I’m starving in my spirit, hungering, and thirsting!
Nourish, my God, this empty soul.

The Scripture

2 Timothy 3:1-5

You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!

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

Synopsis: The Psalmist said, *“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts.”* Just as a doctor requests an MRI of the body, God asks for an MRI of our inner parts; our souls. Sin breaks. Sin fragments. Sin disrupts. The soul MRI reveals our need for wholeness.

“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, unhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...” (2 Timothy 3:2-4)



Is that not just the most depressing snippet of Scripture... ever? Whew. I'm sorry to even bring it up but there it is, right in front of us and it's heavy. *“Understand,”* Paul writes, *“the last days will be distressing.”* Another version says, *“Don't be naïve. There are trying times ahead.”* Another yet says, *“You've got to realize that difficult times will set in.”* Okay, okay already.

The Greek word for *difficult* shows up in some various ways throughout Scripture. It's used in other places, translating more closely the English words, *“violent, dangerous, or threatening.”* It's used elsewhere yet to describe what we would call an *ugly* wound. No matter the angle you come at it, it ain't good. Paul's not trying to sugarcoat anything. *“Look,”* he says, *“You're going to live through some seasons when life is going to feel like you're constantly ripping off a giant scab from your soul.”* Do you get this feeling? It seems like you might.

This week alone has been a doozie. This theme kept popping up. Someone close to me said one night this week, *“I'm at the bottom. This is the worst. I'm done.”* And he would have used any one of those various translations of *difficult*... probably the nastiest ones – *violent, dangerous, threatening, ugly* wound. Another close to me suddenly boarded a plane flying South, heading to a specific rehabilitation center. She felt it's her only shot. Twenty-something years old. Maybe you understand the desperation.

Our staff team spoke this week of summer fatigue... which we rolled into... "COVID fatigue." It's exhausting; isn't it? All of the unknowns and losses and mysteries. "What are we going to do?" we ask. There are too many needs and not enough resources... too much money at the end of the month. There is too much hate and not enough love. There is too much fear and not enough peace. And Paul says, "You gotta understand... distressing times will come." Yeah... well... thanks a lot, Paul.

A colleague of mine tells the story of a man who came to his office early in his ministry. The man's name was Scott; and Scott, while seemingly healthy and succeeding at life, was totally distressed. Just a reminder that most everyone you encounter in the day may look totally fine on the outside but may be having a great battle going on the inside. Life was hitting dead end after dead end for Scott, and he just finally says, "I can't do it anymore. I don't think it's worth it." Rock-bottom kind of stuff, you know?

My colleague, Craig, scrambled to know how to react. He was young and hadn't had much experience in these sorts of heavy conversations. And he said, "Then I did something I've never done before and honestly haven't done since." He got out a pen and notepad and he blurts out to Scott, "I believe you're supposed to give me a hundred reasons why your life matters. Just say them to me, and I'll write them down." And Scott looked at him like he was nuts and says, "Nope. I can't think of a single reason... can't name a single one."

"Yes, you can. Tell me something good about yourself."

Scott finally mutters, "Well, I'm kind of a good writer."

Craig said, "There you go. Yes you are." And he wrote that down. "What else?"

"Well," Scott says with this deadpanned look, "I'm funny."

"Okay," Craig thought. Not something he'd noticed before but this was progress and so he wrote it down as number two: "Funny." "Great. Give me something else."

Scott says, "I look a lot like Robert Redford." He didn't look a thing like Robert Redford but Craig says, "Ah... you **are** funny!" And he wrote it down. 100 times over.

After a while his countenance began to rise: "Well, my sister says I'm faithful. My boss says I'm good at my job. And umm... I've got a full head of hair."

About 25 reasons in, Scott began to cry and pour out reason after reason of why his life was valuable. 100 reasons to be encouraged. And then they prayed together. Craig asked God to put these reasons on his heart that he would always know he has a God who loves him, believes in him and has much purpose in his life. Craig folded up the

yellow notepad piece of paper and gave it to Scott and believed God was going to do something in his life.

Could it be? We never know. We can't see that far into the future these days and you have no idea what today's encouragement might mean for tomorrow's distressing, difficult, violent, dangerous, threatening, ugly wound of a day. But this we know... the soul was made to be whole... and encouragement of the soul is the path to wholeness.

Paul, writing to Timothy, his young protégé, was telling him not to get drug down by the negative, negative, negative, negative... did I say, "*Negative?*" negative spirit of the culture. Such negativity is good for nothing but breaking down the soul. Paul describes with one of the most terrible pictures in the New or Second Testament of what a God-less world would be like. Timothy is working and serving in Ephesus which may have been the greatest economic market in the ancient world. Trade tended to flow down river valleys, and Ephesus was at the mouth of the River Cayster and was the place where some of the greatest trade routes met. It was like the hustle and bustle of the Connector here in CoMo at 63 and 70 or the buzz of The District downtown on pre-COVID game days. Ephesus was called "*The Treasure-house*" or "*The Vanity Fair of Asia Minor*." Listen to how theologian William Barclay describes it. "*Ephesus was the town of a prosperous, materialistic civilization; it was the kind of town where a man could easily lose his soul.*"¹ One might make nothing more than a small leap to say Ephesus could be Anywhere, USA, in 2020.

"You just wait, Timmy," Paul says... "in those dark days, people will get caught up in themselves... they'll love money more than life itself... they will brag 'til the cows come home (which apparently is a long time)... and worse yet, Timbo, they'll get arrogant. No one can mistake the braggart whose swagger and blustering around his or her way into power and eminence is unmistakable. But the sin of arrogance, Tim, is a sickness of the heart... for they might even appear humble but on the inside they have great contempt for everyone else." And he just pours on... "*These people will do nothing but tweet insults all day, disrespect their elders, lie like it's going out of style. They'll be treacherous (which in Greek means traitor... they'll be treasonous). Backstabbing will become sport and the worst of it, Timothy? People will retain some outward appearance of religion, but they will deny its power to change anything. They'll go through the motions but will be horrified when it is suggested that authentic spirituality is a dynamic power that can transform one's soul.*"

Could this be the world we're living in right now? Every day, we're battling the negativity. The news is feeding us, and we've been eating it, cleaning our plates with it. When you watch the news, what do you think? Do you battle the negativity by saying to your own spirit, "*God provides. God moves. God works in all things for good.*" What's your mantra? Where's your internal dialogue hanging out these days? It's tough. And

¹ Exegetical support, including this quote, found in William Barclay's commentary on the 2 Timothy. Westminster Press. 1975.

there's so much swirling around us that it becomes hard to remember what we're supposed to be convicted about right now. Do you know what happens when we're living in that swirl of negativity? We begin to drift. And I've never seen a human drift toward health or drift toward discipline. No. We drift toward apathy. We drift toward bad habits. We drift toward despair. And Paul says, "*Don't let it get your soul, Timothy.*"

Mumford and Sons – one of my favorite bands. I've been in the concert pit a few times with Marcus Mumford and I tell you... that guy can bring it. His parents, John and Eleanor Mumford, are the national leaders of the Vineyard Church in the UK and Ireland. Marcus, in his song writing, clearly wrestles with matters of faith and the quest of the soul. He also sweats ... a lot... like me when he really gets going. His soul sweats ... just comes out of his pores if you know what I mean? The guy's passion is unmatched. You heard Ed, Nollie, and friends offer one of Mumford's songs earlier in the service – "*Awake my Soul.*" I've been in crowds of tens of thousands... remember concerts?... (I've got to quit saying ... remember this, remember that... I feel like Chris Farley when he'd do that bit on SNL. He played himself as a nervous talk-show interviewer who never really asks a legitimate question because he's so nervous. Paul McCartney was on one time and Farley, like a nervous fan, would try to interview him always by starting with, "*Remember that time...*". He'd say, "*Remember that time when you were in the Beatles?*" And Paul would say, "*Uh, yeah... I remember.*" And Farley would respond to every similar question, "*That was awesome.*" Remember that time?) Anyway, I've been in those concert crowds, and the souls of thousands singing, "*Awake my soul!*" Do they even know what they're singing? The lines are potent: "*Where you invest your love, you invest your life!*" Yes! "*Awake my soul! You were made to meet your Maker!*"

Yes! Remember that time? That was awesome. But this is the soul working toward wholeness. Mumford joins theologian Ignatius who says, "*What matters most to soul is the full realization that: We come from God. We belong to God. We are destined for God.*" The work of the soul, then, is to be awakened... engage the challenge of discerning: To what or whom do we belong? Where have we come from? Where are we destined to go next?" Those are your soul questions for the week: To whom do I belong? Where have I come from? Where am I going next?

To get into this soul-place... the quest for your soul to be whole... is no easy route. In fact, we lose the quest for this wholeness when we give up our life's calling for simple comfort or complacency. What is that pursuit? And you know what I've discovered about that calling? It's not always about what you do but who you do it for.

I never imagined putting big plastic letters on stakes and spelling words with them in people's yards... at night... in the dark... as a total surprise to the homeowner. But I've done it many times and I've done it for my wife. I've done it *with* my wife. Love does it

for love. She's done far more for me than that. It's not always about *what* you do but *who* you do it for.

I measured out spaces in the backyard this past week with cones and set up these drills with Hayes as part of his evaluation for flag football. I'm sure the neighbors worried about me with my clip board and stop watch and drills all set up. *What are you doing, Dude?* But it's not all about *what* you do... it's *who* you do it for. And Hayes loved every minute of it.

I pull over in the empty church parking lot one night with my soon-to-be 15-year-old daughter, who reminds me she'll be getting her driver's permit soon. We drive all around the lot in fits and starts... "*Turn, turn, turn... brake, brake, brake!*" Not my ideal night out but it's not ultimately *what* you do but *who* you do it for.

Doing for others in love is the best counter to the concerns of Paul to Timothy – of getting lost in negative swirling greed and scarcity mentalities and run-over-the-competition approach to every day. The soul's quest for wholeness is not really wrapped up in what one does but who one does it for. And ultimately... when it comes to our souls... to whom do we belong? To whom will we return? Who do we do it all for? God.

May this be an encouragement to your soul today. You were made to meet your Maker. Where you invest your love, you invest your life. And you've got 100 reasons to be encouraged. Write them down. It will cut through the layers of our materialistic culture into the depths of what really matters to you. And as you're getting your own soul on a track toward wholeness, you can help others, too. You can help them by countering the negativity with encouragement. And you may think, "*Eh... that's not my gift.*" It can be. Super easy to get started.

Try this. If you think something good... say it. If someone comes to mind, and you've got an encouraging thing to share, say it. Text them. Write a card. Call them... phones used to be for calling... "*Remember that time...*" Remember when phones were for calling people? It's like I heard this week about MTV – Music Television. "*MTV turns 39 this year. Help celebrate 14 years of music.*" They quit playing music videos long ago it seems. Where was I?

Encourage. Encourage. Encourage. Come on. Can you imagine what we could do for our city even this week? If the hundreds of you watching online right now and the hundred sitting on the hill this morning would make this week a week of encouragement... imagine what a lift we could be for our city. Think something good, say it, text it, tweet it, card it, yard love it, phone call it, blog it, Facebook post it, snap it, gram it, send it, hand it, smile it through your face mask... come on, friends. We could awaken some souls this week. And that's contagious.

It just hit me one day this week as I was stressing about some things... and those people close to me were stressing some things as I named at the start of this message. Time was escaping, and I was lacking the space to get inspired in the right way to pull this message together before taping on Thursday. And ask any preacher whose sermon is not yet written how he or she is sleeping and they'll tell you there's a wrestling. You finally get the words and the courage, and the moment comes and you preach, and then it's over, and the wrestling begins again almost immediately until the next one is poured over and proclaimed and hopefully transformed somehow in the sharing again.

So I was in that place and I got a text from a Tulsa friend that said, *"I don't often do this, but this morning I looked back at my prayer journal from one year ago. On this day, I was praying you up for your sermon the following day at General Assembly. Seems like a long time ago in some ways, lots of changes. But I'm praying you up again today for your sermon of the week and all the ears and hearts that will hear. Have a great day."*

Are you kidding me? Right on time. Same day, I get an email from a Broadway friend... a graduation speech offered by Coach Lou Holtz, most known as the longtime coach of the Notre Dame football team. Basically the first thing he says, *"Everybody you're going to meet in your life needs encouragement."* Right on time. Coach also said, *"You're either growing or dying... trees, grass, marriage, business... growing or dying."* We might add *soul, church, heart...* Let's grow, friends!

Same day... I visit with our own Judi Schoonover at Broadway's Partner in Education – the Center for Early Childhood Learning, North. Amazing place. Amazing people. Amazing facility. And Judi, and the school director, both say to me, *"These kids need some encouragement in their lives."* And I'm thinking, you know, 100 reasons to be encouraged. Could we be that presence in the community this week? Could you be that voice for your significant other? For your kids? For a co-worker? For your community leaders? For the grocery clerk?

You may remember Job... his friends are just dropping the hammer on him... Negative, negative, negative. *"Your fault, Job."* *"Your sin, Job."* *"You're a wreck, Job."* *"If you'd not done that, Job."* And Job finally gives it back to them. He says, *"Is there no end to your windbag speeches?"* That's awesome. Have you ever wanted to use that line? Maybe you've wanted to say that to me. He says, *"What's your problem that you go on and on like this with all the negativity?"* And here's the swing... he says, *"If it were up to me, I'd encourage."*

Would you say that out loud right now? Say it; don't spray it... COVID and all... or type it into the chat: *"If it were up to me..."* Say it now: *"If it were up to me."* And you can

shift the emphasis on any of those words pretty much: “*IF it were up to me...*” “*If IT were up to me.*” “*If it were up to ME...*” If it were up to me, I’d encourage. Let’s do that and see what wholeness we might find in our souls as we plant wholeness in the lives of others.

Remember Craig and Scott? Craig Groeschel now pastors the largest church in America and his 100 reasons to be encouraged inspired this word about encouragement today.² Craig lost track of Scott for the next five years or so after that visit in his office... until one day, Scott showed up in worship with a woman that had become his wife and their baby boy. Craig connected with Scott after the service, and they hugged... remember hugs? Sorry. Looking at his life and how far it had clearly come, Craig asked, “*Do you remember that day in my office?*” And Scott said, “*Every day of my life*” and he pulled out that yellow note pad piece of paper and said, “*I want you to have it.*”

“*No, no, no,*” Craig said. “*That’s yours.*”

Scott said, “*Do you remember that prayer you prayed? I don’t need that paper anymore, because those 100 reasons are now in my heart.*”

You just don’t know. Let’s flip the script on this season we’re growing through. As Paul promised Timothy, there will be difficult, distressing, ugly wound seasons... but... Let’s be those people that encourage. Let’s give Columbia a hundred reasons to be encouraged... why not 1,000... why not more? Where you invest your love, you invest your life. May it be so.

The Benediction
“*I Feel the Lord’s Prayer*”
by Belinda Davis

Our Father,
 Mother,
 Companion of our Souls,
who art in heaven,
 Who walks beside us,
 Who dwells within us, as close as our very breathing,
hallowed be thy name,
 holy is your name,
 Compassion, Creator, Redeemer in your name.

² Craig Groeschel is founder and pastor of Life Church (www.lifechurch.tv). He shared this account and supporting stories that inspired this message on encouragement in his series, “*Stay Positive*,” specifically his message entitled “*100 Reasons to be Encouraged*” found in the “*Media*” tab of their website.

Thy kingdom come,

your community of all,
all that breathes, grows, exists,

thy will be done,

your vision and hope,
your longing for wholeness,

on earth as it is in heaven,

among us, between us,
right here, right now.

Give us this day our daily bread,

give us eyes to see and ears to hear
all you provide to sustain us,

and forgive our debts,

that which we've said and done
that separates us from you, others, and our own souls

as we forgive our debtors,

as we release that which binds us
as we open the way for healing,

and lead us not into temptation,

rather, lead us through it,
teaching wisdom and courage along the way,

but deliver us from evil,

help us recognize and overcome
that which would separate us from you,

for thine is the kingdom,

that point of perfect balance,
the harmony of the whole,

and the power,

disguised as humility,

and the glory,

the longed for hope of wholeness made real

forever and ever,

starting now
in this very moment.

Amen,

may it be so;
may it begin with me.