

SOULSHIFT OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Tell a story of a conversation you have had with another person about their soul. Many people today are not aware that they even have a soul. They are like the French philosopher Ernest Renan who said, “O Lord, if there is a Lord; save my soul, if I have a soul.”

Do you know that you have a soul? There is something deep within you that is responsible for all of you. The Bible uses several words to get at the idea of this:

- *Heart*—the seat of all our affections
- *Mind*—our bias, way of thinking, assumptions, and predisposition
- *Spirit*—our inward person that gives life to our bodies
- *Inward Nature*—our bent, inclinations, and “inner parts” (Ps. 51:6).

What is the state of your soul? What if we took an actual photograph of your soul? What would you look like? How beautiful, elegant, strong, winsome, and attractive would you be to other souls?

Most people’s souls are buried beneath mounds of activity, excuses, comforts, noise, addictions, laughter, small talk, romance, therapy, and entertainment. We are like passengers on a subway, moving quickly from one obligation, relationship, or activity to another, seldom stopping to wonder who and where we really are. Sometimes it seems like the church is trying to save souls without talking about them.

TEXTUAL WORK: A LOOK AT THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Do you think it is possible to be a follower of Jesus and still be out of touch with the state of your soul? Let's look at an example of this in Mark, where we will spend most of our time over the next few weeks.

At the beginning of Mark's gospel, Jesus began preaching that people should "repent and believe the good news" (1:15). Then, a couple verses later he told some of the people to follow him (1:17; see also 2:14). Here are the first three commands in any believer's life: repent, believe, and follow. *Note: You can play on how these three components work together, such as: Many today have repented but have never begun to follow. Others are trying to follow without repenting, and so forth.*

Seven chapters later, after these same disciples had followed Jesus every day for two years, he pulled them aside and asked the question: "Who do people say I am? . . . Who do you say that I am?" (8:27–29). After Peter got it right ("You are the Christ"), Jesus predicted his own death and Peter rebuked him. That's when Jesus uttered the shot heard round the church: "Get behind me. . . . You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (v. 33).

To be "minded" (Greek: *phroneis*) like God is not only to think like him, but to be oriented the way he is oriented. Jesus was saying, "You are not oriented like God; you do not have God's instincts; you and God have different things on your mind most of the time; you have different assumptions; you are not wired the way that God is wired." Jesus seemed surprised, and so are we.

Jesus was surprised that, after all this time, Peter was still not minded like God. After all, he'd been with Jesus every day for two years. That's like coming to church once a week for almost fourteen years.

We are surprised that Jesus still expects him to be. I mean, how could he be? God is God and Peter is not. Who could have the mind of God? Yet the fact that Jesus brought it up implies that he somehow believed this was possible for him (Paul did too; see 1 Cor. 2:9–16; Phil. 2:5).

Discipleship has, as its goal, nothing less than the rewiring of our instincts and the reprogramming of our nature. The goal of discipleship is not only to get us to act like Jesus, but also to react like Jesus. It is to absorb the mind of Jesus into ours until we think and act like him without even trying. Illustration: Think of something you do as second nature—tying your shoes, driving to work, or making coffee. These little acts, which are quite complex if you break them down, have become so natural for you that you can do them without thinking and always get them right. What if thinking and living as Christ was that easy and natural for you? Most discipleship today stops at simply imitating Christ. It does not have in mind the radical rewiring of our instincts and second nature. But Jesus does!

IMPLICATION: INTRODUCING THE SOUL SHIFTS

Over the next seven weeks, we're going to talk about the soul. We're going to help you assess and describe it by giving you a common language, and we're going to help you do something about it. Why? Because the soul is the place where God wants to meet you. *Note: Emphasize the "soul" or "inner being" in the following passages: Psalm 23:3; Matthew 11:29; 2 Corinthians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:8–9.* The writers aren't talking about something God will do with our disembodied spirits after we are in heaven. They are all speaking of something God is going to do (1) in our interior, (2) in this life, and (3) after we have become Christians.

We'll call these changes "shifts," and when they occur at the deepest, most fundamental level of our being, we'll call them SoulShifts. A SoulShift is not the same as getting saved or deciding to follow Jesus. A SoulShift is a change in the deepest part of our being, usually after

we are saved and before we die, that makes us more like Christ and less like our old selves. We may be saved, have repented, and decided to follow Jesus. All of that is good, and if we died today, we would still go to heaven. But heaven has not yet come into us. Our souls may be saved, but they are not yet converted. They have not shifted.

Do a brief study on how earthquakes happen, then compare this to a SoulShift. Deep below the surface of our busy lives, the soul is always moving (like the earth's tectonic plates)—always stirring, tracking, and feeling—and every once in a while, there is a big shift. We want to talk about these sudden, but not spontaneous changes that occur in the life of a Christian, and about how we can cooperate with God as he makes these changes.

We've read through the Gospels with an eye for what Jesus did with his followers after they decided to follow him, and we've been asking, "What are the minds that God was trying to give them, but they still didn't have? What kinds of shifts was God looking for in these believer's lives?" And we've distilled these shifts into seven categories (see *SoulShift: The Measure of a Life Transformed*, pp. 27–29).

APPLICATION: NEXT STEPS

Over the next few weeks, begin praying that God will use our study to speak to you. Pray like this: "Search me, O God, and know me. Speak to me, and lead me in the way of life. As we begin our study of the SoulShifts, I give you permission to speak to me about any of them. I am listening. Help me to be humble and open to new things so that I won't miss your very best for me. In the name of Christ. Amen."

Then talk about the SoulShifts with a friend or in your class or group: Which one(s) really got your attention? Which is the easiest, most natural one for you? Which is the hardest, and why? Spend a few moments dreaming of what it might be like to have shifted in that area.

Have fun with it. Think about what it would be like if our whole church made one or more of these shifts. How would that affect the personality and mission of our church?

CONCLUSION

Have you wondered how many problems in your life, church, or city come from people who follow Jesus but have not yet shifted in one or more of these ways?

What would happen if God helped you shift in one of these areas? What could happen in our city if a whole church shifted in just two of them?

Note for Closing: Have the congregation read a relevant corporate prayer.