

## Session 2: Living Soulfully Book Highlights

### 7. The Big Question

"Am I living the lesson of this story?" "You're not happy, are you, Matthew?"

"Why don't you try stopping by church for ten minutes on the way to school each morning?"

**Resistance loves keeping us busy with anything but the one thing that will most help us grow.**

**Nobody had ever taught me how to pray.**

I knew how to say the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be. But nobody had ever taught me how to just spend time with God.

First time in my life that I felt consciously peaceful.

Resistance suggested that missing prayer a day here and there wouldn't make a difference. But it did.

The inner life—our relationship with God and spirituality—is the leaven that allows every other facet of our lives to rise.

Without this inner life, our lives are flat.

Some days I slayed resistance, and other days it slayed me.

Planning my day wasn't really prayer. I began to speak to God about what was happening in my life and the things that were on my mind.

Have a casual conversation with God about whatever was on my mind.

**"God, this is the situation...these are the circumstances.... What do you think I should do?"**

Moment of surrender. Big question: "God, what do you think I should do?"

The moment we open ourselves up to God's plans is the moment miracles begin to happen in our lives.

Our lives change when our habits change. New habits bring new life.

**KEY POINT** Prayer changes everything, and nothing ever really changes until we give daily prayer a place in our lives.

**ACTION STEP** Ask God for his advice. Take ten minutes sometime today to sit with him in silence. Present to him the biggest question you are struggling with at this time in your life, and ask him, "God, what do you think I should do?"

### 8. Four Words

When was the last time you paused to really think about your life? I can't remember the last time I purposefully made time to think about my life and how I am living it."

Resistance loves to keep us busy. When we are too busy to reflect on how we are living our lives, it is almost certain that we are not busy doing the right things.

There are four words that embody the challenge of the Christian life; we find them in the fifth line of the Our Father: **Thy will be done.** These four words present the greatest challenge of Christianity. How do you react to these four words?

### **It all depends on our image of God.**

It is important that we constantly reflect upon our image of God. Our image of God is the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and the world.

What is my image of God? How do I see him? What are his attributes?

When Jesus invites us to call God Father, he is inviting us to a very intimate relationship with God, and telling us that the transcendent God of the universe is concerned with the needs of each and every one of us. Jesus is constantly presenting a beautiful image of God.

“Noah did everything that the Lord God commanded him to do.” (Genesis 7:5)

It is not easy to walk with God. It is not easy to live as he commands us to live. When was the last time you knew exactly what God was inviting you to do in a situation but you did the opposite?

We live in a culture that says the meaning of life is to get what we want, and that when we get what we want, then we will be happy. We yearn for happiness because we were created for it, so we fall for the lie. We race off into the world to get what we want, but sooner or later we all realize that getting what we want doesn't make us happy.

**God wants to help you become a phenomenal decision maker.** He wants to set you on fire with passion and purpose. He wants your yes to be a passionate and enthusiastic YES, and your no to be a firm NO.

**It is so easy to become lukewarm,** but he doesn't want that for you. The thing about being lukewarm is nobody ever thinks they are.

The other thing about being lukewarm is that it is so easy to blend in. The lukewarm typically go to Mass every Sunday and give money to their parish and other charities. From the outside, they appear to be committed Christians.

But the lukewarm also tend to choose convenience and comfort over what is right and just. They rarely talk about God or their spiritual journey. Jesus is part of their lives, but he is not at the center of their lives. They are not willing to make sacrifices to grow spiritually. They almost never think about heaven, but are instead obsessed with the things of this world. They structure their lives so they never really have to trust God too much. The lukewarm watch television shows they know don't make them the-best-version-of-themselves, and swear, and drink far too much from time to time.

**God doesn't want us to be lukewarm.** He wants to set us on fire. And when we are on fire we have great clarity and become excellent decision makers.

When was the last time you invited God into your decision-making process?

When did you last ask God to advise you about a big decision you had to make? Decisions are the foundation of life. With each decision, we choose order or chaos, clarity or confusion, life or death, with God or against God.

Every decision we make leads us either toward the peace and happiness we yearn for or away from it.

Saint Augustine famously wrote in Confessions, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you Lord."

God invites us into a deep life of prayer so that he can fill us with a peace that nobody can take from us.

**Surrender to these four words: Thy will be done.** Invite God into the center of your decision-making process. Seek his will in all things.

The idea that we can find happiness outside of God's will is one of the most absurd ideas in history, and yet we each employ this concept in some way great or small every day of our lives.

**KEY POINT** These are the four words that embody the Christian challenge: Thy will be done.

**ACTION STEP** Take a few minutes to reflect on your image of God. Write down the qualities that make up the way you see God. Try to trace each quality back to its roots in your life.

## 9. Are You Spiritually Healthy?

I have been encouraging people to set aside ten minutes a day for quiet prayer. "How many days last week did you spend ten minutes in quiet conversation with God?"

First, because this habit of prayer changed my life. Second, because I know from personal experience how hard it is to keep the habit going.

Resistance will fight me every time; it will never just let me sit down and begin my prayer. It will try to distract me and discourage me. It will do anything and everything to prevent me from doing my prayer.

And if resistance cannot get me not to pray, it will get me to delay, to put it off until later. **Resistance knows that delaying my prayer is as good as a victory.** Because I will either rush it or do it poorly later, or I will delay it further, putting it off at every opportunity all day long, and then not do it at all.

Always take your first opportunity each day to spend time in prayer. The daily habit of prayer leads us to spiritual health. The more ingrained this habit becomes in our lives, the clearer we hear the voice of God. The clearer we hear the voice of God in our lives, the more likely we are to walk in his ways, honor his will, and experience the peace and happiness he yearns to fill us with.

When we are spiritually healthy we tend to be focused, invigorated, patient, and generous. When we aren't healthy spiritually we tend to be irritable, restless, and discontented.

It's interesting how seldom we talk about spiritual health. If you think about all the focus we place on physical health, and the billions of dollars we spend trying to achieve it, and then consider how little we talk about spiritual health, it says so much about the state of our culture.

God wants to bless you with spiritual vitality.

We all have an inner life. This consists of our thoughts and feelings, our hopes and dreams, our character and our relationship with God.

We all have an outer life, which consists of the things we do, places we go, and things we build or own. We tend to focus on the outer life, but it is only a tiny fraction of our life.

I am going to encourage you to pay more attention to your inner life.

Going to show you step-by-step how to do that

**The first step is to establish a daily habit of prayer.**

Try to establish a time each day to pray, and pray at the same time. Human beings thrive on routine. Ten minutes a day.

I love sitting in a quiet, empty church to pray.

As you begin to go deeper and deeper into prayer, God will help you to answer four questions: Who am I? What am I here for? What matters most? What matters least?

“How is your prayer life?” Get into the habit of asking yourself the question and it will encourage you to continue to focus on the interior life.

Your soul has ways of showing you it is hungry too.

**KEY POINT** God wants to bless you with spiritual vitality.

**ACTION STEP** Establish a daily habit of prayer. Start with the Prayer Process, which you will find at the end of this book.

## **10. Get Busy Living**

Since the beginning of Christianity, the Church has encouraged followers of Jesus to ponder the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. If you only have six months to live, you would live the next six months very differently than you were planning to.

The reality of death rearranges our priorities. It may sound weird or warped, but I think being told by your doctors that you have six months to live is one of life’s ultimate luxuries.

After that news, there is no middle ground; something is either very important or not important at all.

“What are your dreams?”

It is good and healthy to think about death from time to time. It puts things in perspective and reminds us what really matters. The perspective that death is inevitable reminds us to get busy living.

**KEY POINT** It is healthy to reflect on the fact that life is short and we are all going to die.

**ACTION STEP** If you died today, what would you wish you had done differently? Reflect.

## 11. Ordinary Things

Even our good qualities can get in the way of experiencing God.

Planning is good and necessary up to a point, but we find God in the now. God lives in the eternal now. He is constantly inviting us to immerse ourselves in the present moment so we can be with him. Sometimes planning the future can be a way of avoiding the present, and when we avoid the present we avoid God.

Often, we find God in the mess of our lives, the mess of our personalities, and the mess of our own brokenness. One of the greatest mistakes in history has been to go off looking for God in the extraordinary. God occasionally uses the extraordinary to get our attention, but since the beginning his favorite place has been amid the very ordinary things of life. A child in a manger—what could be more ordinary?

Looking for three qualities. Each new candidate needed to be: committed, coachable, and aware. This third quality, awareness, is one of the great gifts of the spiritual life.

**God wants to give you present-moment awareness.** He wants you to be aware of things while they are actually happening. God wants you to be fully aware of every breath of air you take, every bite of food, every smile from a baby, every word you read, every song you hear, every kiss on the lips. God loves ordinary things.

**KEY POINT** God wants to give you present-moment awareness. He wants you to be aware of things while they are actually happening.

**ACTION STEP** Learn to find God in the ordinary activities of daily life. At the end of the day, write down three times when you were fully aware of God in your day.

## 12. Living Soulfully

He invited me to live soulfully.

**Most people have an aha moment in their spiritual journey.** I like to call it a Pentecost Moment. It is the experience that makes everything fall into place and make sense.

From this point on we become more open to God, and more interested in things that are spiritual. There is a before and after effect, just like there was with the disciples.

Universal call to holiness, **God calls every man and woman to the joy of a holy life.**

Some things I do help me become the person God created me to be, and some things don't. It was as simple as that.

When I did something that I knew was God's will, something that would clearly help me become a-better-version-of-myself, I was filled with joy. When I did something that I knew was wrong or was clearly not good for me, that joy began to evaporate.

You cannot stand still in the spiritual life. You can't take a break.

**The-best-version-of-yourself to explain the universal call to holiness.**

**Every moment of every day, every situation, every person we encounter is an opportunity to become a-better-version-of-ourselves.**

Going to Mass on Sunday, praying before meals, reading the Bible, sitting with a lonely friend and just listening, taking a few minutes to pray at the beginning of the day, reading a good spiritual book, going away on a retreat or pilgrimage, and serving the poor at a soup kitchen are all opportunities to grow in awareness and become a-better-version-of-ourselves.

**The Pharisees focused on their belief that they were better than their fellow man.** This type of thinking has infected every religion, organization, club, and association since the beginning of the world.

Some who would rather focus on pretending they are better than others than concentrate on improving themselves.

The true call of God is a call to personal conversion.

He invites me to change and grow every day, and he promises me his grace. He invites me not to become superior to other people, but to become superior to my former self. He wants myself of today to be a better self than myself of yesterday. God invites me to collaborate with him in my daily conversion.

**KEY POINT** Some things you do help you become the person God created you to be, and some things don't.

**ACTION STEP** In each moment of each day choose the-very-best-version-of-yourself. Ask yourself, is what I am about to do going to help me become the-best-version-of-myself?