

Series – ALL IN

#3 Love God with ALL Your SOUL

Mark 12:30

Introduction: Financial advisors will tell you that the wisest way to invest money is to be diversified. As the old saying goes, 'don't put all of your eggs in one basket.' That means learning how to balance your comfort level with risk against your time horizon. The 4 primary components of a diversified portfolio are: Domestic stocks...Bonds...Short-term investments (CD or Money market) ...International stocks.

If you invest conservatively at a young age, you run the risk: (1) that the growth rate of your investments won't keep up with inflation, and (2) your investments may not grow to an amount you need to retire with.

Conversely, if you invest too aggressively when you're older, you could leave your savings exposed to market unpredictability, which could erode the value of your assets at an age where you need retirement funds to live on.

That is good advice, but here is the best advice. When it comes to the most important investment you will ever make, **which is your life**, God's strategy is just the opposite. Don't diversify, do give all your life completely to Jesus. [work life, family life, financial life]

We explored this as our vision theme series, 'ALL IN' began two weeks ago. Luke 9:23, ***'Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me '***

Taking up your cross and following Jesus daily, is what it means to go ALL IN. And just so you know, you are in the process of dying and being resurrected every day. You die to your old life and get resurrected to your new life in Christ. You die to your childhood and resurrect to adulthood. You die to your single life and get resurrected to married life when you tie the knot.

Last week I introduced a new scripture that shows us what else “ALL IN” looks like. ***In the book of Mark, chapter 12, beginning with verse 28 it says, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”***

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

We can usually visualize what it might look like to love God with our hearts and minds, and strength. Loving God with all my heart means have passion and compassion. My mind involves my thought life, so loving God with all my mind means I need to be aware of what I think about and fill my mind with Scripture.

But what about loving God with all my soul? What does this look like. I’m glad you asked, because that is our message today. **Loving God with ALL our SOUL.**

LET’S PRAY

Before we get started let me share a couple things to set you at ease.

We all love God in all four of these ways, but each of us tends more naturally toward one than the others. **God has created you primarily to love Him as a talker, a feeler, a thinker, or a doer.**

Talkers most easily love God with their hearts.

Feelers love God with their souls.

Thinkers love God with their minds.

Doers love God with their strength.

The work of God will not be complete on just communication from talkers, consideration from thinkers, and contribution from doers. We also need the care and concern of the feelers who love God best with their souls.

Today we’re going to focus on what it means to love God with all our soul.

I. What Does the Bible Say About our Soul?

“In the beginning...” (Genesis 1:1) God created everything out of nothing. When the Lord God created man, Genesis 2:7 tells us, **“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”** The Hebrew word used is *nepēš*, which is also translated, **soul**. When we define our soul, we must realize without God having breathed the breath of life into the first man’s nostrils, we would not be living souls.

God breathed the breath of life into man’s nostrils, so that the Spirit of God moved into it and man became a **living soul**, a distinct individual, a distinct personality.

The word soul is so prevalent in the Old Testament, the KJV utilizes forty-two English words to translate it, with the two most common being soul and life.

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology defines soul in the Old Testament as, “simply the life principle or living being.”

And in the New Testament, the term psyche is used in place of soul. “It frequently designates life, a person or self, the expression of emotions, soulish indicates a person governed by the sensuous nature with subjection to appetite and passion.”

Dr. Andrew Murray writes that the gifts with which the soul was endowed when man became a “living soul”, were those of “consciousness, self-determination, or mind, will and emotions”.

Dr. Murray also says **“The spirit is the seat of our God-consciousness; the soul of our self-consciousness; the body of our world-consciousness.”**

The body of man is world - conscious. It is through it that human beings relate with each other.

The soul of a man is self - conscious. It is the seat of his intellect, will and emotions; It is through the soul that a man knows that he is bold, weak, strong, and intelligent and that he is different from any other person.

The spirit of man is God - conscious, it is through it that he realizes that there is God and recognizes His Lordship.

Repeatedly in Scripture, people are referred to as "souls" (Exodus 31:14; Proverbs 11:30). The human soul is that part of a person that is eternal—the part that lives on after the body dies and decays. Jesus said we were not to fear men, who can only kill the body, but not the soul (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus Christ, because he was fully man as well as being fully God, also had a human soul. His soul experienced anguish at Gethsemane while He prayed before going to the cross. He said "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:36-46).

It is the deepest part of who we are, the part of us that searches and yearns for something more than just physical life. The soul is also the most vulnerable part of who we are; It is the part of me that sincerely longs to love, believe, and find purpose.

Your soul is of infinite worth. Now your body may be killed, and your body may dissolve, but your soul, wed to your spirit inseparably, will never, ever cease to exist. Your human soul could no more cease to exist than God Himself could cease to exist, because you are made in the image of God. **In the truest sense, you don't have a soul; you are a soul. You live in a body.**

Every person you have ever met is a soul, living in a body, and that soul will last forever, either in Heaven or Hell.

Let me tell you five things that make your soul invaluable.

1. Creativity.

The creator of anything adds to its worth. The Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 that, "God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10 tells us, "We are His workmanship." You are the crowning work of God's creative genius.

2. Potentiality.

Something is worth a lot not only because of what it is, but because of what it can be. One day, you can be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

3. **Durability.**

If you have something that's not going to last very long, then obviously it doesn't have as much value as something that will last longer. Your soul will go on through all eternity. You could never cease to exist anymore than God Himself could cease to exist. Your soul is durable. It will last either in Heaven or in Hell. It will go on and on and on.

Let me tell you another thing that makes your soul of great worth, and its...

4. **Rarity.** The rarer a thing is, the more valuable it is. Your soul is unique and rare. God made you unique. There's not anyone else like you. God never makes copies. You are the rare handiwork of God.

And then, last of all, I'll tell you what else makes a thing valuable, it is...

5. **Desirability.**

Any realtor will tell you if he goes to do an appraisal on a piece of property. It doesn't matter how much you've spent on it, it doesn't matter how much you've painted it, fixed it up or how much you think it's worth.

Its value is what somebody is willing to pay for it. And based on that, do you know how much you're worth? See Jesus Christ in agony and blood dying upon that cross. First Peter 1:18 and 19 say, ***"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as a Lamb without spot and without blemish."***

1 Thessalonians 5.23 reads: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

According to the Apostle, a person is wholly sanctified by his spirit and soul and body being kept. This verse also makes a distinction between spirit and soul; otherwise, Paul would have said simply "your soul." Since God has distinguished

the human spirit from the human soul, we conclude that man is composed of three, parts: spirit, soul and body.

The order which God presents to us is unmistakable: ***“your spirit and soul and body”*** (1 Thess. 5.23). It is not “soul and spirit and body,” nor is it “body and soul and spirit.” The spirit is the pre-eminent part, it is mentioned first; the body is the lowest and mentioned last; the soul stands between.

The SOUL represents the part of man’s free will in which spirit and body are completely merged. If man’s soul wills to obey God, it will allow the spirit to rule over the man as ordered by God.

The soul stands between these two worlds yet belongs to both. It is linked with the spiritual world through the spirit and with the material world through the body. The soul makes it possible for the spirit and the body to communicate and to cooperate. The work of the soul is to keep these two in their proper order so that they may not lose their right relationship, namely, that the spirit may govern the body through the soul.

This we can see in Luke 1.46-47 when Mary says: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Darby). “Here the change in tense shows that the spirit first conceived joy in God, and then, communicating with the soul, caused it to give expression to the feeling by means of the body.” (Pember’s Earth’s Earliest Age)

The human soul can be strong or weak (2 Peter 2:14), saved or lost (James 1:21; Ezekiel 18:4). It was created by God (Jeremiah 38:16). The human soul needs the protection, purification, and atonement of God (Leviticus 17:11; 1 Peter 1:22). The human soul is imperishable, and every human soul will be somewhere for eternity (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46).

II. What is the difference between the soul and the spirit?

The words "soul" and "spirit" are found throughout the Bible, each occurring hundreds of times in the Old and New Testaments.

While the two words are often used interchangeably, the primary distinction between soul and spirit in man is that the soul is the animate life, or the seat of the senses, desires, affections, and appetites. The spirit is that part of us that connects, or refuses to connect, to God. Our spirits relate to His Spirit, either accepting His promptings and conviction, or resisting Him and proving that we do not have spiritual life (Acts 7:51).

In Hebrews 4 the Holy Spirit relates to us the ministry of the Lord Jesus as the High Priest. Verse 12 says, "**12For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**" (NIV)

The intention of the Holy Spirit here is to show how the Lord Jesus fulfills His work as the High Priest with respect to the believers' soul and spirit. The priests of old divided the sacrifices with a knife.

It is by two things that a believer's soul and spirit are divided by the Lord. The first is the cross, and the second is the word of God. The sacrifices had to be laid on the altar before the priests could cut them in half. We know that the altar of the Old Testament is the cross of the New Testament. Unless the believer is willing to come and pick up his cross and is willing to be crucified with the Lord, he cannot expect the High Priest to divide his soul from his spirit with God's sharp sword, His word.

Dr. R. C. Sproul said, "Humans cannot see the soul, nor can they see, at least ordinarily, joints and marrow. God, however, is not only able to see these parts, but He can also divide them with His Word."

Jesus, as fully God and fully man, stood in our place on the cross and is the atonement for our sins. The first man, Adam, became a living being...the last Adam (Jesus) became a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Before we can love the Lord with all our SOUL, we need two things.

A. We Need Rest for Our Souls

The word “soul” is used many ways in the Bible. But most of the time, it’s used as a synonym for emotions. The Bible talks about souls that are downcast, disturbed, satisfied, yearning, troubled, forlorn, joyful, bitter, thirsty, hungry, rejoicing, and delighted.

Jesus saw the soul's desperate need in those who struggled with the overwhelming tasks of their life. Such weariness and endless labor were, to him, a sure sign of a soul not properly rooted in God—a soul, in effect, on its own. He saw the multitudes around him, and it tore his heart, for they were "distressed and downcast" like "sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

And Jesus invited all who were weary to come and "learn of me."

Being in his yoke is not a matter of taking on additional labor to crush us even more, but a matter of learning how to use His strength and ours together to bear our load. We will find his yoke an easy one and his burden a light one because, in learning from him, we have found rest to our soul. What we have learned is, primarily, to rest our soul in God. Rest to our soul is rest in God. Our soul is at peace only when it is with God.

ON THE OTHER HAND, sin or disobedience to what we know to be right distances us from God and forces us to live on our own. That means it makes soul rest impossible and is very destructive to the soul. ***"He who is a partaker with a thief hates his own soul," the proverb says (29:24, PAR).***

THERE is IN FACT an inner affinity between the law and the soul. Walking in the law with God restores the soul because the law expresses the order of God's kingdom and of God's own character. That is why it converts and restores the soul. Psalm 19:7a, ***"The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul."*** (NIV)

Only God can satisfy the spiritual parts of us. That’s important because if we want to be secure and strong, we need to learn to recognize when our soul is unsatisfied.

The feeling of emptiness is a red flag that our souls need God, but often what we do instead of turning to God is trying to fill the emptiness inside us with more things, more approval from people around us, more success at work, or more

sources of physical and emotional comfort. ***As the deer pants for streams of water, So my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:1-2 NIV***

Unless we stop and pay attention to what our soul needs, we will always search for satisfaction and love in all the wrong places.

B. We Need to Restore Our Souls

The Hebrew word for “restore” is used over 1000 times in the Old Testament and it has the connotation of rescuing and renewing and to return a thing to its original condition. If you are going to be restored, you must be restored to something - something that you once were.

You are being returned to a former better state. The only thing God can restore you and me to that we once enjoyed was not a better or a nicer you - but a perfect, complete, and whole you - the you God created that got lost in the pain and sin of life.

God’s restoration means that He brings us back to a state of new strength, vigor and eternal perspectives. When we allow the Lord to restore us, He rebuilds and repairs our frail nerves, worried mind and worn-out bodies. God’s word, His Spirit and the presence of Christ brings joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control in exchange for self-destructive fleshly tendencies. Without God’s restoration we will quickly give in to discouragement, destructive attitudes and temptations.

The transformation of our soul requires that we acknowledge its reality and importance, understand scriptural teachings about it, and take it into the yoke of Jesus, learning from him humility and the abandonment of "outcomes" to God. This brings rest to the soul. Then our soul is re-empowered in goodness by receiving the law and the Word into it as the structure of our covenant fellowship with God by His grace.

I recently read about a musical trainer hired to work with opera singers who could not hit certain notes within a particular octave even though the notes fell within their vocal range. It was a musical mystery.

The trainer did extensive testing on their vocal cords, but he couldn't find any reason why they couldn't hit those notes. Then, on a whim, he tested their hearing. And what he discovered is that these opera singers could not sing a note they could not hear. The problem wasn't singing. The problem was hearing.

Until you hear the voice of God, you won't be able to sing His song. That's how we get stuck in sinful habits and negative cycles and destructive patterns. But when you open the Bible and really hear the voice of God—His loving voice, His graceful voice, His powerful voice, His convicting voice, His affirming voice, His authoritative voice—your life begins to echo God's. Your life becomes a joyful noise. Your life begins to harmonize with the Holy Spirit.

III. Worshipping the Lord with ALL our SOUL Means:

A. Rediscovering Our Sense of Awe and Wonder in God

Jesus knows the importance of the soul and He asked: ***“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** Matthew 16:26.

Our soul is like an inner stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other element of our life. When that stream is as it should be, we are constantly refreshed and exuberant in all we do, because our soul itself is then profusely rooted in the vastness of God and his kingdom. A little child that has been allowed to develop naturally and has been nurtured in all aspects of its being gives us the best presentation of what a life flooded with a healthy soul looks like.

A child lives with a sense of awe and wonder. Nothing should be more natural than unadulterated awe in response to the Creator and His creation. When we lose our sense of wonder, what we really lose is our soul.

Illustration: In *The Island of the Colorblind*, Oliver Sacks writes a colorful account about a tiny island in the South Pacific. Pingelap is an atoll of three small islets whose total area is less than three square miles, and the highest elevation on the island complex is only ten feet above sea level. In 1775, Typhoon Lengkieki swept

over the island, destroying all the vegetation and killing 90 percent of its inhabitants. The twenty survivors resorted to fishing as the only means of survival until the island was revegetated.

After the great typhoon, a genetic peculiarity evolved. A surprisingly large proportion of the next generation was born colorblind. Elsewhere in the world, fewer than one in thirty thousand people is colorblind. On the island of Pingelap, one in twelve is born with the condition.

The high percentage can be traced to the fact that several people in the surviving gene pool carried a rare gene responsible for congenital achromatopsia.

Those of us with normal color vision have approximately seven million cones, allowing us to distinguish up to ten million different colors. Congenital achromatopes have no functional cones. They rely exclusively on the hundred twenty million low-light photoreceptor rods in the retina. As a result, they are hypersensitive to light. They often wear several pairs of sunglasses or avoid lights altogether.

The sad irony is that few places on earth are more beautiful or colorful than this tropical paradise. "It was striking how green everything was in Pingelap," notes Sacks, "not only the foliage of trees, but their fruits as well—are both green, as were many varieties of bananas on the island." The island is full of "brightly colored red and yellow fruits—papaya, mango, guava." The island is literally bursting with tropical colors, but the colorblind Pingelapians cannot perceive them.

There are miracles all around us all the time, but we lack the perceptual capacity to perceive them. We are in the presence of God, but we are unaware of it. We are surrounded by the glory of God but can't see it.

STORY: In 1801, Sir David Brewster was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree from the University of Edinburgh and was ordained to preach. But his first sermon turned into his last sermon. Brewster was so nervous when he got behind the pulpit that he vowed to never do it again. In the words of a colleague, "It was a pity for the National Church of Scotland, but a good day for science." Brewster

decided to pursue his first love, the science of optics. And in 1816, his childlike passion produced an invention that has captured the imagination of children ever since. Brewster called it a kaleidoscope. Containing fragments of colored glass at the end of a mirrored tube, the kaleidoscope reflects light in an endless variety of colors and patterns.

If you had to describe Scripture in a single word, it would be kaleidoscopic, colorful, many-colored. You can read the same verse on different occasions, and it will speak to you in totally different ways. It reminds me of the adage "You never step into the same river twice." In a similar vein, you never read the same verse of Scripture the same way twice.

Rediscovering the wonders of Scripture requires more than reading. You must meditate on it. Then you must live it out. Meditating on it turns one-dimensional knowledge into two-dimensional understanding. Living it out turns two-dimensional understanding into three-dimensional obedience.

Not unlike the radio waves that transmit voices and pictures and signals at different frequencies, the Spirit of God is always broadcasting. But we've got to tune in to His frequency. The Holy Spirit has multiple channels of communication. He speaks through His creation. He speaks in a still, small voice. He speaks through sanctified desires, divine appointments, and open doors. He speaks through Spirit-prompted friends who care enough to rebuke, correct, and exhort us. And thank God for all those frequencies. But His primary channel of communication is the Holy Bible.

Here's the secret: you can't just read the Bible; you must meditate on it. **Reading gives breadth to our understanding, but meditation gives depth.** If all we do is read Scripture, then our understanding is one-dimensional.

Reading without meditating is like taking one glance through the kaleidoscope without turning it. So many colorful and beautiful patterns of truth remain undiscovered simply because we think we've seen everything there is to see when we haven't seen anything yet. The word meditate is repeated 8 times in Psalm 119.

In some Eastern religions, meditation is the practice of emptying one's mind. But biblical meditation is the opposite. It is filling the mind with the Word of God. If the goal of reading is to get through the Bible, the goal of meditation is to get the Bible through us. Or in keeping with the metaphor, meditation is turning the kaleidoscope to reveal new patterns of light.

The human brain typically produces **beta waves** that oscillate between thirteen and twenty-five cycles per second, but when we are in a state of relaxed alertness, the brain produces **alpha waves** that oscillate between eight to twelve cycles. So what? Well, some truths are only comprehended via contemplation. You quite literally must get on the right wavelength. If surface knowledge is sufficient, beta waves will suffice. But the only way to get truth into your soul is via alpha waves. You can't just think with your mind. You must think with your soul.

To quote Mark Batterson: **“If loving God with all of our heart means a heart that breaks for the things that break the heart of God, then loving God with all our soul means a soul full of wonder, a soul flooded with the glory of God, a soul awed by beauty and mystery, a soul that hallows God above all else.”**

To love God with all our Soul, we need to be able to see the beauty and mystery of creation. We need to be amazed by what God created. We need to be humbled by how every aspect of creation works together in ways that we will never understand. This is worship in its truest form!

Thomas Carlyle said, “Worship is transcendent wonder.”

TRANSITION: The hard question we need to ask is, have we as Christians, lost some of that wonder? Are we looking, but not seeing?

B. Rediscovering Our Sense of Awareness in God

Leonardo da Vinci once said that the average person... **“looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, inhales without awareness of odor or fragrance, and talks without thinking.”**

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says, ***“9However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” 10but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” NIV***

There is a moment when we become self-conscious. There is a moment when we become conscious of the opposite sex. In a similar sense, there is a moment when we become God conscious. **God consciousness is the most primal form of consciousness.** And the longer we journey with a healthy soul, the more aware of His presence we become, until we see Him everywhere all the time.

A relationship with Christ doesn't always change our circumstances, but it does change the way we see ourselves, see others, and see God. Why? Because we become less self-conscious and more God-conscious.

Do we really see things the way God wants us to? Do we look but not see, or only see a portion of what He is trying to show us? Jacob had this problem, he had faith but did not live accordingly. He essentially did not see clearly.

In Genesis chapter 28 we find Jacob on his way to Paddan Aran to find a wife, as his father Isaac had told him to do. We will begin reading at verse 12.

Genesis 28:12-17 “12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All people on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” 17 He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

As verse 16 tells us, Jacob was not aware of the presence of the Lord. He went to bed not paying attention to God, not having the Holy Spirit open his eyes.

When Jacob woke up, he was seeing God. Had anything really changed? No, God had always been there, the only thing that changed was that Jacob's eyes were opened. Jacob was now aware of the presence of God; he saw God everywhere he looked. In other words, Jacob was filled with Wonder over what God was doing in that place.

To Love God with all our Souls we need to be aware of God. We need to look and see Him. That He is at work in our lives and the world around us, and that He is always there. We need to be conscious of God. As we grow as Christians, we become more aware of God and begin to see things as He sees them. We become more and more amazed by His creation. As we become more conscious of God, we Love Him with all our Soul.

C. Rediscovering Our Sense of Appreciation of God's Grace

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him. So he went to the Pharisee's house. He took his place at the table. There was a woman in that town who had lived a sinful life. She learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. She came there with a special jar of perfume.

38 She stood behind Jesus and cried at his feet. And she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair. She kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39 The Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this. He said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him. He would know what kind of woman she is. She is a sinner!"

Luke 7:36-39 NIV

This story introduces us to two very different people and we can learn a lot about loving God with all our soul from their relationship with Jesus.

Simon the Pharisee

First, the Pharisee (who we later learn is named Simon). The Pharisees in Jesus' day were well-known experts in religious law. Many of them were small

landowners and traders. Knowing this, we can extrapolate a few things about Simon:

He was probably well-respected in the community.

He probably had a good, clean reputation, since Pharisees held strictly to religious traditions.

He must have had a home big enough and nice enough to host Jesus and His friends for dinner.

Not everything about Simon is negative. He invited Jesus and his friends over for dinner. He was hospitable. He seems like he was trying to do the right thing. On the outside, he seems to be what many of us would consider a good guy. He could be any one of us.

But then we learn a few other things about Simon:

He did good things on the outside (being hospitable, inviting Jesus to dinner) but hid his real thoughts.

He was a critical observer. He looked down on Jesus and the sinful woman, noticing what he perceived as their faults without admitting any of his own.

Now, let's look at the "sinful woman." What do we learn about her?

The sinful woman

This woman "had lived a sinful life." She was familiar with the guilt, regret, and shame that come from sinful choices.

She had a reputation in the community. People knew "what kind of woman she was." She wouldn't have been invited to this dinner party because the host looked down on her and her choices. She must have been familiar with being judged, criticized, and rejected.

This woman—full of guilt, shame, and a bad reputation—gives us a picture of what it looks like to love God with all our soul. In the Bible, spiritual lessons often come through the people we least expect. The religious Pharisee, an expert in religious law, does not teach us to love God. The sinful woman does.

She gave Jesus everything, the deepest parts of herself. Here are a few lessons we can learn from this woman about what loving God with all your soul looks like:

She cared more about God than what people thought

This woman had a bad reputation and yet she showed up at a party she wasn't invited to. That alone would take monumental boldness. She could have been kicked out or humiliated. She would have to face the critical stares of many self-righteous people. But she showed up anyway. And not only did she show up, she went out of her way to lovingly express her gratitude for Jesus.

How did she get this boldness? We later learn that her heart was deeply moved by Jesus' love and forgiveness. This forgiveness meant so much to her that any concern about other people's opinions of her flew right out the window.

She was vulnerable and unguarded

She stood right behind Jesus and cried. She didn't hide in the crowd to watch him from a distance. She let down with Jesus, crying tears probably filled with pain, sorrow, and regret—as well as hope, relief, and gratitude for the forgiveness she knew he offered. The soul is by definition deep and emotional. If we are not willing to vulnerably open our hearts, we cannot love God with all our soul.

She sacrificed

She brought a special jar of perfume to Jesus. This perfume was costly and may have been the most valuable item she owned. Loving God with all our soul means recognizing that nothing is more valuable than our relationship with God and being willing to give him everything.

She was humble

It must have taken great humility for this woman to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair and tears in front of so many other people. She wasn't vying for position or praise at the party. Instead, she served him —carrying out a humbling task with great willingness and eagerness. This was a way for her to admit her great need for Jesus as well as her gratitude for him.

She was self-aware

This woman knew herself and how much sin she had, which left no room to look down on anyone else. She wasn't spending time criticizing or judging other people. She was just genuinely grateful for Jesus.

Gratitude gives us love for God

As he so often did, Jesus made the most of this opportunity to turn it into a teachable moment. He knew Simon's thoughts, and responded to this religious man with a lesson about love:

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said. 41 "Two people owed money to a certain lender. One owed him 500 silver coins. The other owed him 50 silver coins. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back. So he let them go without paying. Which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who owed the most money.

"You are right," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman. He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water to wash my feet. But she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss. But this woman has not stopped kissing my feet since I came in. 46 You did not put any olive oil on my head. But she has poured this perfume on my feet. 47 So I tell you this. Her many sins have been forgiven. She has shown that she understands this by her great acts of love. But whoever has been forgiven only a little loves only a little." Luke 7:40-47 NIV

Jesus used this illustration to teach Simon (and us) what it takes to love him with the deepest, most vulnerable parts of ourselves. In the story Jesus told, the guy who had the most debt forgiven was the most grateful and loving.

The sinful woman gave God her all because she was so incredibly grateful for his forgiveness. Gratitude is key to loving God with all our soul. The Bible tells us that

we love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:10). We can't love God with all our soul if we have lost our gratitude for him and all he has done for us.

We can't love God with all our souls without recognizing and understanding how much we have been forgiven for. And we can't recognize how much we have been forgiven without recognizing our sin. Gratitude and a deep understanding of God's forgiveness are key to loving God with all your soul.

WRAP UP

So, to be Great at loving God with all our Soul, we need to:

Wonder over the things God has created.

Allow God to change our perspective, so that we can see Him.

Have a sense of Gratitude.

The Bible says, "Let the Spirit direct your lives, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature" (Galatians 5:16 NLT).