

## THE INNER LIFE OF A LEADER

*"The term 'soul' is an assertion of wholeness, the totality of what it means to be human. 'Soul' is a barrier against reduction, against human life reduced to biology and genitals, culture and utility, race and ethnicity. It signals an interiority that permeates all exteriority, an invisibility that everywhere inhabits visibility."*

(Eugene Peterson)

Soul in the Hebrew language is a metaphor – *nephesh* – the word for the neck. This narrow channel connects the upper and lower functions, the heart and head, it carries breath/spirit/life. It speaks of connectivity (wholeness) and vulnerability (the mighty jugular vein so close to the skin surface).

Peterson, in 'Christ plays in a ten thousand places' plays the term 'soul' against the more modern term 'the self'. He states: 'when soul and self are turned into adjectives in colloquial speech... soulish gives a sense of something inherent and relational, entering depths, plumbing the underlying sources of motive and meaning.... Selfish on the other hand, refers to the self-absorbed, uncaring, unrelational – a life that is all surface and image.'

It is this 'nephesh' that we must care for, nurture. This longing for relationship, intimacy, worship and beauty – for we see the self so at work, our brokenness so in play.

*"Understanding is the basis of care. What you would take care of you must first understand, whether it be a petunia or a nation. If you would care for your spiritual core – your heart or will – you must understand it." (Dallas Willard)*

### 1. The need to function

The world we live erodes our soul-spirit

- It is a mechanistic world – and we tend to see ourselves as cogs, as functional. And we are reasonably satisfied when we are functioning well.
- Our external world naturally expands (while our internal world requires intentional development)
- But we can become quite detached from ourselves, the longer we function in a role (we can come to think it is what we are).
- The more out of alignment our gifts and calling are, relative to the role, the more we will leak passion, hope, humanness.
- Defn of burnout

Burnout is almost never the result of our private world, it is the public world of work that causes it. Indeed it can overpower our private world to the point where we function externally and implode in our private world.

*"As a result of extensive study, we believe that burnout is not a problem of the people themselves but of the social environment in which people work." (Maslach and Leiter)*

- Hypothermia

*"Burnout is the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit and will – an erosion of the human soul.... A situation of chronic imbalance in which the job demands more than you can give and less than you need." (Maslach and Leiter)*

They suggest this is caused by:

- Work overload
- A lack of control over what we do
- A lack of reward for what we do
- A lack of community
- A lack of fairness
- A conflict between our values and the values of the organisation

They suggest there are three dimensions to burnout (I add a fourth):

- Exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Ineffectiveness
- Loss of emotional resilience

- Our soul just keeps whispering...

## 2. The nature of our inner world

Our inner world, our soul, is the intersection of our minds and hearts, our bodies and spirits (Pr 4:3-7, 24). It is where we really live in a quiet, unguarded moment or in times of crisis and conflict.

- The power of heritage – the natural state of the garden is weeds  
Ephesians 2:1-3
- The power of heritage – the social world that shapes us  
*"The world is an atmosphere"* (Eugene Peterson)
- It is shaped by moments (not days)

*"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."* (Graham Greene)

*"You're stuck in a moment that you can't get out of"* (U2)

- Ongoing pressure can hit a nerve  
2 Corinthians 1:8 (cf chapter 11:21ff)

- The need for reflection

*"There is a unique kind of transparency about things and events. The world is seen through, and no veil can conceal God completely. So the pious man is ever alert to see behind the appearance of things a trace of the divine, and thus his attitude toward life is one of expectant reverence."* (Abraham Heschel)

## 3. Bad theology will do you in

What you believe about God, you and the way of the world affects everything that you do.

*"Our wisdom... consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.... No person can survey himself without immediately turning his thoughts toward God in whom he lives and moves."* (John Calvin)

- What do you believe about God?  
*The shadow of our fathers reaches far indeed...*
- What do you believe about you?  
*Still waiting to be found out?*

- Who are you trying to please? (transference)  
*Just who is the significant other in your life?*
- Are you trying (to perform) or training (to live)

*"Christian spirituality is not for the angels. The angels do not know the addiction of sin. Christian spirituality is for people: bodily, social, embedded in time. It is for men and women who are creatures of God but who are also sinners." (Rodney Clapp)*

#### 4. Building a world with God

We need a secret life with God or we will come to see ourselves as hollow, fake or performing seals:

- The Bible values mystery

*David versus Saul*

- A life unseen that is our life with God  
*The public person, the private life....*
- God secrets (Mat 6:1, 4, 6, 18)
- Coaching (as opposed to supervision)
- Friends  
*"In friendship eternity blossoms" (Aelred)*

*"Bonhoeffer makes apparent how Christian spirituality is participation and formation in the church... we can no more become and grow as Christians apart from the church than we can become accomplished painters and sculptors apart from the guild and the ongoing history of painters and sculptors." (Rodney Clapp)*

#### 5. Understanding our limits

You have more passion and vision than you have capacity. When we begin in ministry we can be carried by our enthusiasm – but don't ever forget this is our apprenticeship. Once you have developed a servant heart and a skill set God will expect you to start listening to him!

- Back to the barbed wire – God will act to narrow you (2 Cor 10:13)
- Are you gifted or governmental (or both)?
- Trust your instincts
- No is a good response