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*Soul Keeping*

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*Our soul is like a stream of water, which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other area 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, including nature; and all else within us is enlivened and directed by that stream. Therefore we are in harmony with God, reality, and the rest of human nature and nature at large.*

—DALLAS WILLARD  
IN *RENOVATION OF THE HEART*

## INTRODUCTION

# HOLY GROUND

Sometimes the soul gets sifted and shaped in places you could never imagine and ways you could never expect. For me it was in Box Canyon.

Box Canyon is a rocky hideaway tucked between Simi Valley and the San Fernando Valley west of Los Angeles. Cowboy B-movies and television westerns like *The Lone Ranger* used to be shot there. It is a hodgepodge of homes ranging from a castle built by a postal worker in the 1940s, to a converted water tower, to a two-story plywood home built over an outhouse. Its occupants tend not to take kindly to zoning officials, who have been known to be shot at and had their tires slashed. It has dirt roads leading to homes guarded by “No Trespassing” signs, or a local variant: “This property protected by shotgun law.” Ten-thousand-square-foot mansions stand next door to cabins with rusting cars and farm machinery in their front yards. It is home to hippies and rednecks and nonconformists, with the occasional drug dealer thrown in for good measure. In 1948, a San Francisco divorcee calling himself Krishna Venta began a commune called WKFL (Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, and Love), with this sign: “Ye who enter here enter upon holy ground.” He said he was 244,000 years old and claimed to be Jesus Christ, but he died along with nine other members when two husbands jealous of his attentions to their wives tossed a bomb into WKFL.

Box Canyon has had two more-or-less-famous residents: one a cult leader and mass murderer named Charles Manson, and the other a writer and intellectual named Dallas Willard. Such are the possibilities of the human soul. Dallas was a retired professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California (USC). I first drove to his home on a sweltering August afternoon more than two decades ago. I had read a book by Dallas that moved me more than anything I had ever read. I was a young pastor at a small church in Simi Valley, California, and was surprised to learn that Dallas lived just a few miles away. I wrote to tell him how much his book meant to me, and to my surprise he wrote back inviting me to come visit him.

I suppose the truth is that a big part of why I went to see him is that he was (in my small world) a celebrity and that I thought if I could be around someone important, perhaps a little importance could rub off on me too. And maybe he could help me become more successful.

I did not know then what I would learn over many years—that he was a healer of souls. I did not know that his home in that quirky little canyon was a kind of spiritual hospital. Long ago, people used to speak of spiritual leaders as those who have been entrusted with the “cure of souls”; we get old words like *curate* from that expression. Dallas was the first soul curate I knew, although that’s not a title bestowed by USC. I thought I might learn something about the soul from Dallas, but I did not know how hungry and thirsty my own soul was. I only knew that at moments when Dallas would look off into the distance as if he were seeing something I could not see and would speak about how good God is, I would find myself beginning to cry.

But before that first visit, all I knew of Dallas was that he taught philosophy at the University of Southern California and wrote about subjects such as spiritual disciplines. I pictured an East Coast, pipe-smoking, sherry-drinking Episcopalian who wore tweed jackets with elbow patches.

Not so much.

I found his address: a small house behind a white picket fence.

When he bought it fifty years ago, it overlooked a lake that has long since dried up; now it offers an excellent view of the San Fernando Valley smog.

Inside, furniture was scarce, old, and inexpensive. The house, like Dallas's head, was mostly furnished with books. There was an air conditioning unit in the living room window that was installed forty years ago and roared like a jet engine, so you had to yell to speak over it when it ran, which was not often. To say that Dallas and his wife, Jane, were not materialistic would be like saying that the pope doesn't date much. Dallas told me once about a construction worker he used to meet with to talk about soul matters. (The picture of a scruffy concrete worker having long talks about God and the soul with an erudite philosopher is a poignant one.) The first time he saw Dallas's house, he went home and told his wife, "Honey, I finally met someone with furniture worse than us." I think Dallas took it as a compliment.

I was nervous when I knocked on the door, but Dallas was a difficult person to remain nervous around. "Hello, Brother John," he said, and somehow I felt immediately accepted into a little circle of belonging. He invited me in and offered me a glass of iced tea, then sat down on his favorite chair across from an old sofa.

Dallas was larger than I had pictured, because I had not known that he had played forward on his college basketball team. His hair was wavy and steel-gray; he wore glasses; his clothes suggested that he had long ago mastered Jesus' suggestion: "Do not worry about what you should wear." When Dallas met his future wife, Jane, in a small religious school called Tennessee Temple, she noticed he did not wear socks and assumed it was because he was a rebel; she did not know it was actually because he couldn't afford them.

His appearance was unremarkable except for two things. His voice had the faint suggestion of British precision that all philosophers seem to pick up, but it also carried the touch of the Missouri hills. On the thinker/feeler scale, Dallas was almost pure thinker, but there were times when in speaking or praying, his voice had a tremulous note that suggested a heart that was nearly bursting over some unseen wonder.

The other remarkable characteristic of his body was how unhurried it was. Someone said of him once, “I’d like to live in his time zone.” I suppose if the house was on fire, he would have moved quickly to get out of it, but his face and the movements of his body all seemed to say that he had no place else to go and nothing in particular to worry about.

Many years later I had moved to Chicago. Entering into a very busy season of ministry, I called Dallas to ask him what I needed to do to stay spiritually healthy. I pictured him sitting in that room as we talked. There was a long pause—with Dallas there was nearly always a long pause—and then he said slowly, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” I quickly wrote that down. Most people take notes with Dallas; I have even seen his wife take notes, which my wife rarely does with me.

“Okay, Dallas,” I responded. “I’ve got that one. Now what other spiritual nuggets do you have for me? I don’t have a lot of time, and I want to get all the spiritual wisdom from you that I can.”

“There is nothing else,” he said, generously acting as if he did not notice my impatience. “Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

*Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.*

**DALLAS WILLARD**

As I sipped my iced tea at that first meeting, Dallas asked me about my family and my work. The phone rang—this was before cell phones and answering machines—and he did not answer it. He didn’t even look as if he wanted to answer it. He just went on talking with me as if there were no phone ringing, as if he actually wanted to talk with me more than to answer the telephone, even though it might be someone important. I had the odd sensation (I have talked to many others since then who have noticed the same thing) of having my own heart rate begin to slow down to match his.

The house fit him. Dallas grew up in the Great Depression in a part of rural Missouri that did not have electricity until he

was eighteen years old. When he was age two, his mother died. Her final words to her husband were, “Keep eternity before the children.” As a two-year-old boy, Dallas tried to climb inside the casket to be next to his mother’s body. Since there was not enough money to keep the family together, Dallas was passed from one relative to another until he graduated from high school. Despite these circumstances, he was president of his senior class—all eleven members.

I began by asking him the questions that I thought were why I had come: How is it that people change; what makes change so hard; what does it mean exactly to say that human beings have souls, and why do souls matter? Why is it that I lead a church full of people who believe the right things about God and even read the Bible and pray, but don’t seem to actually change much? Why don’t *I* seem to change much?

He began to talk, and as he spoke, I couldn’t help but think that he was the smartest man I had ever met. Many years later, when he was very sick, Nancy and I would spend a day packing up some of his books in a garage near his home. His primary library was in that home; his secondary library was in another home next door that he and Jane bought many years ago to catch the overflow; his tertiary library was at USC. We packed up more than one hundred boxes of books from his quaternary library, in that garage: books in Latin and German and Greek; books from the world’s greatest minds and from backwoods country preachers. I tease sometimes that I never got in an argument with Dallas because I was afraid he would prove I don’t exist.

Yet Dallas never made me feel stupid. I was dimly aware, as I talked to him, how badly I wanted to impress him with how smart I was, and how I couldn’t turn that little “impress him” switch off in my mind even if I wanted to. Somebody said that if you’re the smartest person in the room, you’re in the wrong room.

Nevertheless, something about Dallas was so safe that I found myself offering unsolicited confessions. “I can’t even talk without trying to sound impressive.” I wanted to impress him, yet at the same time, I was ashamed of that wanting and knew life would be



better without it, and that somehow this was a smart guy whose identity was not in his IQ.

Toward the end of one of his philosophy classes a student raised an objection that was both insulting toward Dallas and clearly wrong. Instead of correcting him, Dallas gently said that this would be a good place to end the class for the day. Afterward, a friend approached Dallas: "Why did you let him get away with that? Why didn't you demolish him?" Dallas replied, "I was practicing the discipline of not having to have the last word."

So, "Yes," Dallas said in response to my confession. "Being right is actually a very hard burden to be able to carry gracefully and humbly. That's why nobody likes to sit next to the kid in class who's right all the time. One of the hardest things in the world is to be right and not hurt other people with it."

Huh?

Over the years, that's the question I most frequently posed to Dallas. "Huh?" Sometimes we would speak together publicly, and my main job was to ask the same questions for others that I asked when it was just the two of us having a conversation.

"Hell is just the best God can do for some people."

Huh?

"I'm quite sure God will let everybody into heaven that can possibly stand it."

Huh?

"Your eternal destiny is not cosmic retirement; it is to be part of a tremendously creative project, under unimaginably splendid leadership, on an inconceivably vast scale, with ever-increasing cycles of fruitfulness and enjoyment—that is the prophetic vision which 'eye has not seen and ear has not heard.'"

Huh?

Sentences would come out of Dallas that simply couldn't come out of anyone else, and then he would leave them in your mind like little time-delay bombs for you to deal with when they go off.

I found myself moving from polite questions about church and ideas to the personal. That little house in Box Canyon began to change from a classroom into a confessional: Why is it so hard for

me to love the actual people in my church? Why is it that I know I want to love my children, but I seem to be driven to be a success—especially in a vocation supposedly calling people to die to their need to be successful? Why do I get jealous of other pastors who are more successful than I am? Why am I never satisfied? Why do I feel a deep, secret loneliness? Why is it that I have a PhD in clinical psychology and a master of divinity and work as a pastor and yet I'm not sure who I am?

"The most important thing in your life," Dallas said, "is not what you do; it's who you become. That's what you will take into eternity. You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe."

Huh?

"You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. That's the most important thing for you to know about you. You should write that down. You should repeat it regularly.

Brother John, you think you have to be someplace else or accomplish something more to find peace. But it's right here. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are. Your soul is not just something that lives on after your body dies. It's the most important thing about you. It is your life."

Long pause.

When I thought about how my life was going, I always thought about my outer world. It is the world of reputation and appearance. It consists of how much I have and of what people think. It is visible and obvious. In my outer world, it is easy to keep score. I always thought that improving the circumstances of my outer world is what makes me feel happy inside.

But this was an invitation to another world—what Gordon MacDonald would call a "private world." It is unseen, unknown, hidden. It would garner no applause. It could be chaotic and dark and disordered, and no one might know. This house belonging to Dallas was where I would go to learn about this secret world.

*The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it's who you become. That's what you will take into eternity.*

**DALLAS WILLARD**

It was a humble house, sweltering in the heat with an ancient air conditioner, piled high with books and papers and a few old pieces of furniture. The sign was invisible, and it would take years before I could read it: “Ye who enter here, enter upon holy ground.” Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, and Love had a home in Box Canyon after all.

Dallas once wrote about a tiny child who crept into his father’s bedroom to sleep. In the dark, knowing his father was present was enough to take away his sense of aloneness. “Is your face turned toward me, Father?” he would ask. “Yes,” his father replied. “My face is turned toward you.” Only then could the child go to sleep.

Over the years I sought Dallas’s wisdom to help me understand the human soul, and in this book I will share what I have learned. But I did not really just want to know about *any* soul. I wanted to know that *my* soul is not alone. I wanted to know that a face is turned toward it.

That’s the journey we will take together.



PART 1

# WHAT THE SOUL IS

# THE SOUL NOBODY KNOWS

One of the most important words in the Bible is *soul*. We throw that word around a lot, but if someone were to ask you to explain exactly what the word *soul* means, what would you say?

- *Why should I pay attention to my soul?*
- *Hasn't science disproven its existence?*
- *Isn't the soul the province of robe-wearing, herbal-tea drinkers?*
- *Isn't "soul-saving" old-fashioned language that ignores concerns for holistic justice?*
- *Won't it mean preoccupation with navel-gazing? Will I have to go to Big Sur or look some stranger in the eyes? Will I have to journal?*

Belief in the soul is ubiquitous: "Most people, at most times, in most places, at most ages, have believed that human beings have some kind of souls." We know it matters. We suspect it's important. But we're not sure what it means.

It's the word that won't go away, even though it is used less and less.

From birth to our final resting place ("May God rest his soul"), the soul is our earliest companion and our ultimate concern. The word is ethereal, mysterious, and deep. And a little spooky. ("All Souls' Day" comes two days after Halloween and has always

sounded to me like disembodied spirits floating around at the Haunted Mansion in Disneyland.)

How many of our children learned this prayer? How many times have *you* recited it at bedtime?

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Is it just me, or are those scary words to teach a seven-year-old to pray alone in the dark? I guess it's not just me: "That [prayer] so, so did not work for me..." wrote Anne Lamott. "Don't be taking my soul. You leave my soul right here, in my fifty-pound body."

What does it mean to ask God "my soul to keep"? If I expire before sunrise, and he takes my soul, what exactly is it that gets taken?

## HOW MUCH DOES A SOUL WEIGH?

Jeffrey Boyd is a kind of Don Quixote of the soul. He is a Yale psychiatrist, an ordained minister, and coauthor of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, a work in which you will search in vain for a single reference to "soul." It does include something called "depersonalization disorder," a feeling of estrangement from oneself. But Boyd also writes books and articles trying to reinject the word *soul* into our scientific vocabulary.

In one study of hundreds of church attenders, Boyd found that most people believe they know what *soul* means, but when asked to explain it, they can't do it. The soul turns out to be like Supreme Court Associate Justice Potter Stewart's description of obscenity: "It may be hard to define, but I know it when I see it." About half of church attenders adopt what Boyd calls the Looney Tunes Theory of the soul:

If Daffy Duck were blown up with dynamite, then there would be a transparent image of Daffy Duck that would float up from the dead body. The translucent image would have wings and

carry a harp. From the air this apparition would speak down to Bugs Bunny, who set off the dynamite.

It sounds funny to talk about cartoons when it comes to the soul, but as Aristotle said, “The soul never thinks without a picture.”

The soul can’t be put under a microscope or studied by X-ray. About a hundred years ago a doctor measured the slight weight loss experienced by seven tuberculosis victims at the moment of death, which led him to claim that the soul weighs twenty-one grams. His idea years later created a title for a movie with Sean Penn and Robin Wright, but it was never duplicated and was widely ridiculed in the medical community. Some are convinced that soul language needs to go.

A philosopher named Owen Flanagan says there is no place in science for the notion of a soul: “Desouling is the primary operation of the scientific image.”

But Boyd argues that we see people who have a strength of soul that simply will not be degraded by the humiliation their body puts them through. He writes of a woman named Patricia who suffered from the effects of diabetes, a heart attack, and two strokes; she went blind, went into renal failure (which required dialysis), and had both her legs amputated—all while only in her thirties. She was placed in a nursing home, except for those several times a year when she had to be hospitalized, frequently going into a coma for one or two weeks during those stays.

Pat was part of a church in Washington, D.C., that wanted to create a homeless shelter. They could not find anyone with the leadership skills to pull it off, so she volunteered. In between dialysis and amputations and comas, she pulled together the team and got the zoning changes, architectural help, and fund-raising done. She then helped the team figure out the rules for the homeless people who used the shelter, and she recruited and trained the staff who ran it.

When Pat died after the shelter’s first successful year in operation, homeless people stood next to U.S. Cabinet members such as Secretary of State James Baker at her funeral.

The soul knows a glory that the body cannot rob. In some ways, in some cases, the more the body revolts, the more the soul shines through. People may claim to believe that all you are is your body. But Pat said one time, “The only thing I can depend on with my body is that it will fail me. Somehow my body is mine, but it’s not ‘me.’”

*Greatness of soul is available to people who do not have the luxury of being ecstatic about the condition and appearance of their bodies.*

Greatness of soul is available to people who do not have the luxury of being ecstatic about the condition and appearance of their bodies.

## THE HIGH AND THE LOW OF THE SOUL

We can’t seem to talk about beauty or art without talking about the soul—particularly music. Aretha Franklin is the Queen of Soul. It is possible that if your soul isn’t moved by Ray Charles, Otis Redding, Little Richard, Fats Domino, or James Brown, you may want to check to make sure you still have one. Kid Rock wrote “Rebel Soul.” A sixteen-year-old, wanna-be pop singer named Jewel hitchhiked to Mexico and watched desperate people looking for help and wrote what would become her breakthrough song: “Who Will Save Your Soul?”

We need the word when we speak of not just the highest, but also the lowest parts of human existence. Over one hundred years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois called his book about the oppressed humanity of a race *The Souls of Black Folk*. No other word would do: *The Selves of Black Folk* does not carry the same dignity. “Soul food” would be the name given for Southern cooking that began with slaves who had to survive on whatever leftovers they were given. “Soul power” became the name for a sense of dignity and worth in a people who had been forced to live with neither. “Soul brother” reflects the bond that knits together those persecuted because of skin color.



Does soul require suffering to make itself known?

We speak of larger entities having soul. During every election, politicians and pundits warn us that the soul of America is at stake. ServiceMaster CEO William Pollard wrote a leadership book called *The Soul of the Firm*. (Can a cleaning company have a soul?) Shortstop and team captain Derek Jeter has been given the title “soul of the Yankees.” Quarterback Tom Brady deemed receiver Wes Walker the “soul” of the New England Patriots. These may be metaphors, but they point to the notion of the soul as that which holds a larger entity together.

Why do the Chicago Cubs never get a soul?

## SOUL FOR SALE

We speak of the soul as a source of strength, and yet we speak of it as fragile. Something about the soul always seems to be at risk. A soul is something that can be lost or sold. The selling of a soul has been made into countless operas, books, and country music lyrics, as well as a movie called *Bedazzled* and a musical called *Damn Yankees*. Jonathon Moulton, a New Hampshire brigadier general in the 1700s, sold his soul to the Devil (according to legend) to have his boots filled with gold coins monthly when he hung them by the fireplace. In the television series *The Simpsons*, Homer sells his soul for a donut and then impulsively eats all but one bite, which he puts in the refrigerator with the instructions: “Soul Donut. Do Not Eat.”

Periodically somebody tries to sell their soul on eBay. Most recently a woman named Lori N. offered hers for \$2,000 after a car accident left her strapped for cash. No takers, though. It turns out eBay has a “no soul-selling” policy that allows them to stay neutral on the existence of souls: If souls don’t exist, they don’t allow the selling of nonexistent items; if souls do exist, they don’t allow people to sell themselves off one part at a time. The real problem, they say, is that if you sell something on eBay, you have to be in position to deliver what you sell. If you could buy a soul through anybody, it would probably be Ikea—Swedes will sell pretty much

anything—but then you would have to take it home and assemble it yourself from instructions that make no sense at all.

Souls keep popping up in our most loved stories. Harry Potter is a teenage wizard with a chosen destiny to overthrow the evil dark wizard, Voldemort, who murdered his parents. Harry discovers deep connections of the soul with the Dark Lord. The greatest sin, murder, is discovered to tear the soul asunder, damage that can only be healed by honest remorse. The Dementor's kiss is a fate worse than death—to have one's soul removed by a soulless creature. To live without a soul is worse than not living. "Have you no soul?" is really another way of saying, "Is it possible that your mind with its values and conscience are not even troubled by what your will has chosen and your body carried out?"

Does a fetus have a soul? A whole debate about abortion rages around this. Does life happen at conception? Is that when a being becomes human? Plato believed souls were reincarnated based on how elevated they were last time around: wise souls come back as seekers of beauty or kings or athletic trainers, whereas cowards come back as women and boozers may come back as donkeys. Augustine said that maybe souls preexist somewhere and then slip into bodies on their own, like people picking out a good car.

We are not sure what the soul is, but the word sells. Advertisers speak of cars being soulful; Kia actually manufactures a car called the Kia Soul. Is it for people who want to go beyond transportation to transmigration? You can also find the Soul Diva (for the "style conscious woman who regards her car as important as her entire outfit"); the Soul Burner (the "bad boy" of the Soul concept); and the Soul Searcher (for the driver focused on "achieving personal inner peace and creating a calm cocoon for occupants").

Maybe that's my problem: when I was growing up, we had a Rambler.

The word *soul* won't go away, because it speaks somehow of eternity:

Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take'em out and look at'm very often. We all know that *something* is

eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars. . . . everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it.

A movie called *The Sixth Sense* starring Bruce Willis tells of a little boy cursed with the gift of seeing dead people. A huge twist comes at the end of the movie; I don't want to spoil it for you, but Bruce Willis, much to his surprise, turns out to be one of the dead people. A kind of mirror image to the story—and maybe the eeriest of all psychological diagnoses—is a condition known as “Cotard's syndrome.”

Named for the French neurologist who described it in the 1880s, Cotard's syndrome ranges from claims that central organs are missing to the belief that one is already dead. It's sometimes called Walking Corpse Syndrome. Jules Cotard described a woman he called Mademoiselle X, who claimed that God did not exist and that her soul did not exist and that she was nothing more than a decomposing body. Eventually she died of starvation—which must have come as a great shock to her. In one condition, a soul is dead but thinks it's alive; in the other, the soul is alive but believes it's dead.

*In one condition,  
a soul is dead but  
thinks it's alive;  
in the other, the  
soul is alive but  
believes it's dead.*

Are souls reserved for humans? If a computer were able to think—could it have a soul? Stanford professor Clifford Nass wrote the book *The Man Who Lied to His Laptop*.

He has found that human beings treat computers the same way we treat people—we are flattered by their praise; we want to please them; we will even lie to them to avoid hurting their feelings. Could a computer be able to love a family, or enjoy a sunset, or grow in humility? What about souls and technology? Aristotle said that a friend is one soul in two bodies. Would the same thing be true of somebody if you cloned them?

## A WINDOW TO YOUR SOUL

We speak of the eyes being the window to the soul. Scientists say the eyes can reveal our inner thoughts. For instance, when people are doing hard mental work, their pupils dilate. Daniel Kahneman wrote about researchers monitoring the eyes of subjects trying to solve difficult math problems. They would sometimes surprise subjects by asking them, “Why did you give up just now?”

“How did you know?” the unsuspecting students would ask.

“We have a window to your soul.”

Psychologist Edmund Hess writes how pupils widen when people look at beautiful nature pictures. When I was in grad school, I saw two famous pictures of a lovely woman — identical, except that in one of them, her pupils are dilated, and that picture is always judged much more attractive. Belladonna, an herb-based drug that expands the pupils, is actually sold as a cosmetic. Professional poker players sometimes wear sunglasses simply to keep their pupils from giving their excitement away.

U.S. President George W. Bush said that when he looked into Russian President Vladimir Putin’s eyes, he was able to get a sense of his soul. Senator John McCain later said that when he looked into Putin’s eyes, he saw three letters: “A K and a G and a B” (a reference to the former Soviet security agency).

My first date with the woman who would become my wife did not begin well. She actually fell asleep. But it was the last ten minutes that turned things around, when we talked to each other, and (she told me later) I made great eye contact. She told me she thought that was sexy. Can a soul be sexy?

We can’t talk about our work without talking about our souls, although they often seem at odds. A “soulful work” movement suggests that while cubicles and monitors make us more efficient, our souls lose something when disconnected from the rhythms of working outdoors, of making things with our own hands. And the Internet is full of lists of the ten or twenty most soul-crushing jobs in the world, such as “Jobs that make you feel like a caged ADHD

Chihuahua on Red Bull.” Maybe there should be a Take Your Soul to Work Day.

When we talk of love, we speak of soul. No one searches for the love of their life on a site called BodyMate.com. In his dialogue *The Symposium*, Plato has Aristophanes present the story of soul mates. Aristophanes states that humans originally had four arms, four legs, and a single head made of two faces, but Zeus feared their power and split them all in half, condemning them to spend their lives searching for the other half to complete them. In the film *Jerry Maguire*, Tom Cruise’s character expresses the idea unforgettably to Renée Zellweger: “You complete me.” Can one person really complete another? Do we all have one and only one soul mate out there in the world someplace?

Churches are supposed to know about souls. We often sing a song that originated as a psalm: “Bless the Lord, O My Soul.” How can your soul bless, or make happy, the Lord? Sometimes we speak of souls as if they are spiritual scalps: certain people who are highly regarded as “soul-winners” or who are especially adept at going after “lost souls.” We get teary-eyed at the evangelist who desires to win “just one more soul for Jesus.” Old-time evangelist Billy Sunday used to calculate how much money it cost him to save a soul: in Boston in 1911 it was \$450. Churches did the job more economically: Congregationalists came in at \$70 per soul, Baptists at \$70, and Methodists at a staggeringly low \$3.12 — which was cheap even by the 1911 standards!

The universal distress signal, SOS, is said to stand for “Save Our Souls.” What does it mean for a soul to be saved?

“I don’t deserve a soul, yet I still have one,” writes Douglas Coupland. “I know because it hurts.”

Remember that woman named Pat whose body betrayed a glorious soul? What Jeffrey Boyd did not write in that particular account is that Pat was his wife. Watching her body crumble, he watched something deeper than a body shine. He wrote in another place, “If a child is born with such withered legs that there will never be a possibility of walking or crawling, [is] the child’s soul

*If a child is born  
with such withered  
legs that there  
will never be a  
possibility of walking  
or crawling, [is] the  
child's soul limited by  
these architectural  
disasters of the spine,  
pelvis and femurs?*

JEFFREY BOYD

limited by these architectural disasters of the spine, pelvis and femurs? I had a son born with precisely these deformities. His name was Justin. That son also died.”

We search for the soul because we're curious. But not just that. The search for the soul always begins with our great hurt.

*If I should die before I wake, I pray the  
Lord my soul to take . . .*

What is the soul?