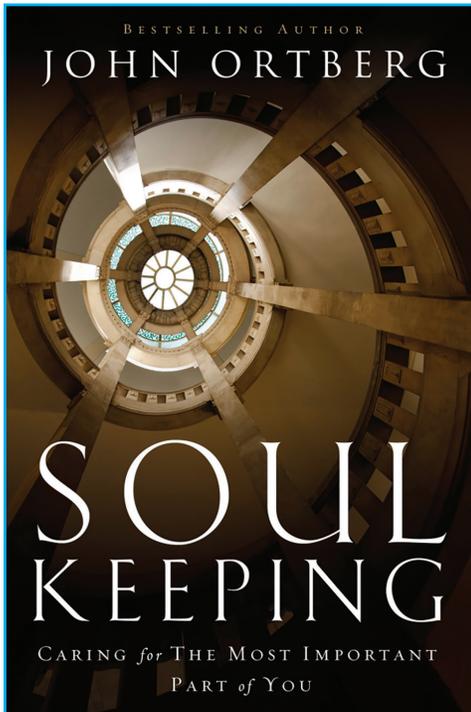


LEADERS BOOK SUMMARIES

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SOUL KEEPING: CARING FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOU

THE NUTSHELL

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Your soul is what integrates your will (your intentions), your mind (your thoughts and feelings, your values and conscience) and your body (your face, body language, and actions) into a single life. A soul is healthy and well-ordered when there's harmony between these three entities and God's intent for all creation. When you're connected with God and other people in life, you have a healthy soul. An unhealthy soul is one that experiences disintegration, and sin always causes the disintegration of the soul.

I'd always thought that a lost soul referred to the soul's destination, not its condition. But it's the condition that's the real problem. We're not lost because we're going to wind up in the wrong place. We're going to wind up in the wrong place because we're lost. This is what it means to lose your soul. It's not a cosmic threat. It's a clinical diagnosis. It's not "I could end up there," but "I could become that." If you're a lost soul, your surroundings don't matter – and I mean this literally – one damn bit.

The soul is a little like the king on a chessboard. The king is the most limited of chess pieces; it can only move one square at a time, but if you lose the king, game over. Your soul is vulnerable because it's needy. If you



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meet those needs with the wrong things, game over. Or at least, game not going well.

If your soul is devoted to something that becomes more important to you than God, that's your idol. The soul cannot give up its idol by sheer willpower. It's like an alcoholic trying to become sober by promising himself that he won't drink anymore. It never works. In many ways, what the Bible calls idolatry we call addiction. You can be an addict and never touch a drop of alcohol or a gram of cocaine. Nice things like food, shopping, recreation, hobbies and pleasure can move imperceptibly from casual enjoyment to addiction. Idols always turn us away from our freedom.

This is where grace comes in. I cannot replace an idol by turning away from it. I must turn toward something. The soul must orbit around something other than itself, something it can worship. It's the nature of the soul to need. What the soul truly desires is God. We may try to fill that need with other things, but the soul will never be satisfied without God. The psalmist describes that need in terms of losing consciousness: "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD."

When the soul lacks a center, it has difficulty making a decision. It feels constantly vulnerable to people or circumstances. A soul without a center lacks patience and is easily thrown. The soul without a center finds its identity in externals. A soul without a center is like a house built over a sinkhole.

When we reach out to God, we're lifting our souls up to be nurtured and healed. A soul centered in God always knows it has a heavenly Father who will hold its pain, its fear and its anxiety. This is spiritual life – to place the soul each moment in the presence and care of God: "My soul cleaves to you, your right hand upholds me." It's much harder than it sounds to keep our souls centered on God. We hold on tightly, but often to the wrong things. But staying centered on God, his word, his ways, is the essence of life for the soul.

Many Christians expend so much energy and worry trying not to sin. The goal isn't to sin less. In all your efforts to keep from sinning, what are you focusing on? Sin. God wants you to focus on him, to be with him: "Abide in me." Just relax and learn to enjoy his presence. Every day is a collection of moments: 86,400 seconds to a day. How many of them can you live with God? Start where you are and grow from there. God wants to be with you every moment.

The biblical writers consistently found when they asked themselves, "How is my soul doing?" that their souls were never satisfied. They're constantly yearning. When the will has become enslaved by its need, when the mind has become obsessed with the object of its desire, when the appetite of the body has become master rather than servant, the soul is disordered. The ultimate reality behind human dissatisfaction is sinful souls that have been cut off from the God they were made to rest in. That's why we're dissatisfied.

The soul is incapable of satisfying itself, but it's also incapable of living without satisfaction. You were made for soul-satisfaction, but you'll only find it in God. The soul craves to be secure. The soul craves to be loved. The soul craves to be significant, and we find these only in God in a form that can satisfy us. That's why the psalmist says to God, "Because your love is better than life...my soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods." Soul and appetite and satisfaction are dominant themes in the Bible – the soul craves because it is meant for God: "My soul finds rest in God."

The default mode of the sinful human race is entitlement, the belief that this gift or that experience God placed in my path is rightfully mine. I'm owed. Here's the deal: the more you think you're entitled to, the less you'll be grateful for. The bigger the sense of entitlement, the smaller the sense of gratitude. We wonder why in our world we keep getting more and more and keep being less and less and less grateful. This is precisely why.



The Hebrew term for gratitude is *hikarat hatov*, which literally means “recognizing the good.” That’s what sustains your soul. That’s what lifts you beyond yourself and into God’s presence. Gratitude doesn’t always come naturally. You won’t always feel grateful, but you can take the time each day to remember the benefits you received, see your benefactor, and thank him for his benefits. As Thornton Wilder put it, “We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.”

“[Redeem] the time,” the apostle Paul said, “because the days are evil.” The reason our souls hunger so is that the life we could be living so far exceeds our strangest dreams: to be able to say yes or no without anxiety or duplicity, to speak with confidence and honesty; to be willing to disappoint anybody, yet ready to bless everybody; to have a mind filled to more noble thoughts than could ever be spoken; to share without thinking, to see without judging, and to be so genuinely humble that each person would be an object of wonder; to love God.

We are the keepers of our souls.



Meet Nelson Searcy

Nelson Searcy is an experienced church planter, coach and church growth strategist, consulting with many of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the world. He's also the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church in New York City. Started in 2002, this groundbreaking church sees the majority of its growth coming from new believers and currently meets in locations in Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island, San Francisco and Boca Raton, FL.

Nelson is the recipient of the prestigious 2013 Donald A. McGavran Award for Outstanding Leadership in Great Commission Research. He's the author of over 75 church growth resources and 14 books, including *The Renegade Pastor: Abandoning Average in Your Life and Ministry*. He's trained more than 50,000 church leaders as founder of Church Leader Insights and the Renegade Pastors Network, which is designed to help pastors abandon average and strive for God's best in their personal lives and ministry.

For more accelerated growth, pastors also participate in Nelson's Senior Pastor and Advanced Coaching Networks. His continued mission is to help church leaders around the world cooperate with God in creating healthy, thriving churches.



Best-selling resources by Nelson Searcy

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This three-hour seminar on Assimilation discusses practical steps that will help you create an inviting environment for your first-time guests, one that they will want to come back to time and time again.

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This sermon series is a great tool to challenge your people toward a "Big Day," equip them to share their own personal faith with others and prepare them spiritually to be used by God.

The New Believer Seminar



Do you have a process that helps people move forward from their decision to becoming fully-devoted followers of Christ? In this resource, Nelson Searcy has developed a valuable system that will equip you to follow up with every new believer God brings to His church.

The Systems Seminar Package



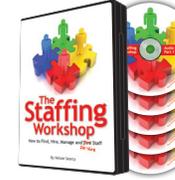
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