

PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH • SERMON

# Spiritual Formation of our Third World Souls

*The Gift of forgiveness, the reality of the soul, and the God who rebuilds the country within*

## Spiritual Formation of our Third World Souls

**A Sermon on the Gift, the Soul, and the Renovation of the Heart**

By A Disciple of Christ • Pleasant Springs Church • July 2026

**Key Texts:** Proverbs 20:12 • Matthew 10:28 • Romans 12:1–2 • Leviticus 25:10 • Colossians 2:13–14 • Mark 13:32 • Colossians 3:3 • Ephesians 4:32 • 3 John 2

Your soul is a hidden country — real, unseen, and, left to the world's forming, impoverished. This sermon walks from the reality of the soul, through the ancient world of gifts and debts into which the gospel first spoke, to the Gift God gives the unworthy and the renovation that Gift funds — until forgiveness overflows onto everyone you know.

Scripture is set out in Greek and ESV together, per our practice: Septuagint (LXX) for the Old Testament, Greek New Testament for the New.

## THE BIG IDEA

Everyone gets a spiritual formation — the only question is who is holding the chisel. Into the bankrupt country of the soul God brings a Gift He never revokes: forgiveness, the canceled debt. And the return that Gift expects is not repayment but transformation — a rebuilt country whose springs overflow, because you cannot share a person you have not met.

## THE COUNTRY NOBODY CAN VISIT

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Some of you have traveled a little. Some of you have never gotten much past Jackson, and that's fine too. But this morning I want to tell you about a country no airline flies to. No road reaches it. No satellite has ever photographed it. And yet every single person in this room is a citizen of it.

I'm not talking about a place on a map — I'm talking about the country inside you. Your soul. And I want to say two things about that country this morning. First: it is hidden — it lies in a dimension your five senses cannot reach. And second: left to itself, it is poor. Broken roads. Downed power lines. Crushing debt. A third world country — not out there somewhere, but in here. And let me be plain: I'm not looking down on any nation on the map. Every country on earth is full of people God loves and treasures. I'm talking about the country inside us.

And the good news of this sermon is that the King has come to that country with a Gift, and He does not do paint jobs. **He rebuilds nations.**

Start with the hidden part. In my study notes this week I wrote it this way: *you live in a dimension where your five senses cannot tell you who you are*. You can see your face in the mirror. You can hear your own voice on a recording — and hate it, like the rest of us. But no mirror has ever shown a man his soul. To know who you are in that dimension, you have to be given ears to hear and eyes to see — by the One who made ears and eyes in the first place.

That's not me being poetic. That's Proverbs:

**Proverbs 20:12 (LXX & ESV)**

οὗς ἀκούει καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς ὁρᾷ· κυρίου ἔργα καὶ ἀμφότερα.

“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both.”

Every instrument you own for knowing the world — God built it. And every instrument man has ever built, from eyeglasses to MRI machines, only reads the outside of things. If you want to know who you really are, you have to ask the only One with access to the inside.

Now somebody's thinking, "Teacher, isn't the soul just a figure of speech? Didn't science do away with all that?" No. And I want to spend two minutes here, because everything else this morning stands on it.

No surgeon has ever opened a skull and found a thought. He finds three pounds of gray matter — neurons, not memories. The scanner can weigh your brain, but it cannot weigh your worry, measure your love, or photograph your faith. Think of the check-engine light on your dashboard. That light is perfectly connected to the engine — but nobody believes the light IS the engine. Your brain and your soul are connected like that. The brain is the instrument. You are the player. Science can map the border of that country all day long. It has never once set foot inside it.

And here's something worth knowing: this isn't just old-time religion talking. Some of the sharpest Christian philosophers alive — men like J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig — have spent their whole careers defending it in the toughest universities in the world. And what they defend is what the church has always believed: you don't just HAVE a soul the way you have a wallet. You ARE a soul, and you have a body. Jesus settled what the philosophers could only argue about:

**Matthew 10:28 (Greek & ESV)**

*μὴ φοβεῖσθε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτεννόντων τὸ σῶμα τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν μὴ δυνάμενων ἀποκτεῖναι.*

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

There is a part of you no bullet can reach, no cancer can touch, no grave can hold. And Paul says that part is under construction right now:

## **2 Corinthians 4:16, 18 (Greek & ESV)**

*ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα... τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια.*

“Our inner self is being renewed day by day... the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

### **Why this matters.**

If you were nothing but chemistry, then everything we do in this building would just be mood management — keeping the machine comfortable till it quits. But because you are a soul, real transformation is possible. And what God transforms, He keeps forever.

Now, Moreland — the philosopher I mentioned — had a teacher he loved like a father. A man named Dallas Willard, who taught philosophy out in California for nearly fifty years and loved Jesus with all of it. And Willard said something every one of us needs to hear: **everybody gets a spiritual formation.** Everybody. The most despicable person you ever met and the most Christlike grandmother in this county — both of them were formed into what they are. The question is never WHETHER your soul is being shaped. The question is who's holding the chisel.

The world around you is forming you right now. The television forms you. The phone forms you. Old wounds form you. Grief and gossip and worry — they're all laying pipe in the country of your soul. And a soul formed by a world away from God ends up like a nation after a long war: the architecture was built for glory, but the power grid is down, the water lines are ruptured, and the debt can never be paid. That's what I mean by our third world souls. Willard called it the ruined soul — lost the way your truck keys get lost. Not annihilated. Just out of its right place, away from God, and no good for what it was made for.

Paul says it plainly:

**Romans 12:2 (Greek & ESV)**

μη συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

Don't let the age press you into its mold — be *metamorphosed*, made new from the inside. Two formations. One from the world, pressing in from the outside. One from the Spirit, rebuilding from the inside. You will get one or the other. Nobody gets neither.

But how does a bankrupt country get rebuilt? It can't fund its own recovery — that's what bankrupt means. Somebody has to come from outside with a gift. And here's where I need you to understand something about the world Jesus was born into.

A scholar named John Barclay spent his career studying gifts in the ancient world, and he found something that will surprise you: back then, **there was no such thing as a free gift**. Every gift came with strings. Every dinner invitation was an invoice in disguise. And the first rule of ancient giving was this: give only to the worthy. A wise man never wasted a gift on somebody who couldn't pay him back in honor or loyalty. Giving to the unworthy wasn't generosity to them — it was waste, a gift thrown away. Seneca, the emperor's own advisor, said a wise man chooses where his gifts go the way a farmer chooses his soil.

Kings, though — kings could do something bigger. In the old empires, when a new king took the throne, he'd sometimes proclaim a clean slate: debts canceled, debt-slaves sent home. And God wrote that mercy into Israel's own calendar. Listen to the Jubilee law — and listen for one Greek word:

**Leviticus 25:10 (LXX & ESV)**

διαβοήσετε ἄφεσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν αὐτήν.

“Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.”

That word for liberty — *aphesis*, release — is the exact word your New Testament uses for the forgiveness of sins. Again and again, when your New Testament says “the forgiveness of sins” — *aphesis hamartiōn* — Greek-speaking ears heard the Jubilee trumpet: debts shredding, chains dropping, everybody going home. And when Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth and read Isaiah, listen for the same word:

**Luke 4:18, 21 (Greek & ESV)**

*κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν... Σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφή αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ὑμῶν.*

“...to proclaim liberty to the captives... Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

He was doing what a king does on coronation day. **He was proclaiming the release.**

But here's the scandal — the part that broke every rule of ancient giving. God gave His supreme Gift to the unworthy. On purpose.

### **Romans 4:5 (Greek & ESV)**

*τῷ δὲ μὴ ἐργαζομένῳ, πιστεύοντι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἄσεβῃ, λογίζεται ἡ πίστις αὐτοῦ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.*

“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

God justifies the ungodly. Rome would have called that wasteful. Heaven calls it grace. And Paul describes exactly what happened to your debt:

### **Colossians 2:13–14 (Greek & ESV)**

*χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον... προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ.*

“...having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us... nailing it to the cross.”

There was a signed IOU with your name on it — your own handwriting, your own sins, not Adam's. We inherited Adam's broken country, the corruption and the dying — but the debts on that paper are ours, because all sinned. And God didn't refinance it. He didn't put you on a payment plan. He nailed it up in public, canceled. Old country churches used to burn the mortgage on the front lawn when it was paid off. **Calvary is God's mortgage-burning**, held in public, for the whole world to read.

### **Hear this, because your assurance hangs on it.**

God does not repossess His gifts. The Giver doesn't take it back when your worth has a bad week.

Now. In the ancient world, remember, a gift always expected a return. And God's Gift does too — but the return is not repayment. You couldn't repay it in two hundred thousand years of paychecks. The return the Gift expects is **transformation**. And mark this — the return is not a condition. The Gift stands whether the rebuilding runs fast or slow. The King does not pack up and leave when construction stalls; He finishes what He funds. Grace comes into the bankrupt country not to be paid back but to rebuild the whole nation.

Willard put it in one line I want you to take home: **grace is not opposed to effort — it is opposed to earning**. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. The farmhand doesn't sweat in the field to buy the farm; he sweats because the farm is already his father's. So we work — we pray, we memorize Scripture, we fast, we serve — not to earn a thing, but to open the roads so the King's supplies can move.

And the rebuilding touches every province of the country: your thoughts — what you let your mind dwell on. Your feelings. Your will — that little executive office where every decision gets signed. Your relationships. Your soul itself. And your body. Don't miss the body. The Greek word is *sōma* — body — and here is what it is: **a sphere of sovereignty**. Your body is the one plot of ground on this earth where your will actually runs. You can't control the weather or the markets or your neighbors — but those few acres answer to you. That's why the rebuilding starts there:

### **Romans 12:1 (Greek & ESV)**

*παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ Θεῷ.*

“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

Presenting your body is handing God the deed to your little kingdom so He can fold it into His big one. And nobody drifts into that. Willard said transformation takes a *vision* of the life, a *decision* to have it, and the *means* to get there. Nobody accidentally learns to drive a combine. Nobody drifts into Christlikeness either.

Now I come to the part of this sermon I've been carrying all week. Because somebody here is thinking: "Teacher, I believe all that. But I don't FEEL it. Most Tuesdays I don't feel forgiven at all."

Listen to something strange Jesus said about Himself:

**Mark 13:32 (Greek & ESV)**

*Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἢ τῆς ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν... οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ.*

"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

How can the Son of God not know something? Faithful scholars have wrestled with that for two thousand years, and one way some of them explain it — William Lane Craig is one — is a picture I find beautiful. Think of an iceberg. Nine-tenths of it rides below the waterline. During Jesus' earthly life, when He walked low among us like one of us, the great mass of who He was — all that divine knowledge and glory — lay beneath the surface of His waking human mind. He never stopped being fully God. The knowledge never stopped being His — in His divine nature He never ceased to know all things and uphold the universe. But in His waking human consciousness, walking dusty roads and getting hungry like us, He didn't access it — so when He said "the Son doesn't know," He was telling the plain truth. One person, fully God and fully man — and who He was ran deeper than what His human mind could presently see.

Now hear my note from this week — and hear it as a picture, not an equation. You don't have divine knowledge buried down in you; nobody here does. But something like that pattern holds for you: **who you are in Christ — forgiven, adopted, seated with Him — is written into you deeper than your conscious mind.** Deeper than your feelings. Down in the depths of you.

### **Colossians 3:3 (Greek & ESV)**

*ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ.*

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Hidden. Not missing — hidden. Like a farmer’s deed recorded at the courthouse: it doesn’t flicker with his feelings about the crop. On your worst Tuesday, when you feel like a failure and a fraud, your identity is still on file in God’s courthouse. Feelings are surface water. Who you are runs deeper — like the water under this county that feeds every spring. And spiritual formation — hear this — is the Spirit’s work of bringing that hidden identity up out of the depths into your waking, walking-around life. Jesus told the truth in the dark, trusting the Father with what He couldn’t presently see. When you can’t feel who you are, you’re standing where your Savior stood. And spiritual formation is where you finally meet — really meet — who you already are in Christ.

And now the whole sermon comes to a point. **You cannot share a person you have not met.**

You cannot give your neighbor a love you've never received. You cannot hand your children a forgiveness you've never held in your own two hands. Before the love of God can flow through you, you have to meet the One it flows from — you have to have His mind in you:

**1 Corinthians 2:16 (Greek & ESV)**

*ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν.*

“But we have the mind of Christ.”

And the mind of Christ starts producing in you the forgiveness only God can give. Mark that — only God forgives sin. We don't manufacture it. We receive it and pass it along. Channels, not sources. Now watch what Paul's own Greek does:

**Ephesians 4:32 (Greek & ESV)**

*χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν Χριστῷ ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῖν.*

“...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

That word “forgiving” — *charizomenoi* — is built straight out of the word for gift. Literally: **gift-ing one another, as God in Christ gifted you.** In God's language, forgiving IS giving. And remember what we learned about ancient gifts: a gift was never meant to stop moving. God's Gift doesn't stop with you. It becomes water.

**John 7:38 (Greek & ESV)**

*ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ῥεύσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος.*

“Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

The water of forgiveness spills over the banks of your life onto everybody you know. Onto your spouse. Onto your kids. Onto that person at work whose debt you've been carrying on your books — the one God already tore out of His. And when the people around you see a rebuilt country where a ruined one used to be — power back on, clean water running, debts forgiven — they start asking the only question that matters: *who did this?* And they want to know who they are in Christ too.

### **SO WHAT?**

Because you cannot share a person you have not met. But oh, when you have met Him — friends, we are called **Pleasant Springs**. A spring doesn't hoard its water. It exists to overflow.

The old apostle John wrote to a friend he loved:

### 3 John 2 (Greek & ESV)

*Αγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν, καθὼς εὐδοῦται σου ἡ ψυχή.*

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”

He measured a whole life by the health of the hidden country. So here’s the invitation. If you’ve never received the Gift — the canceled debt, the Jubilee release — the King is proclaiming it today, and He is not checking your worthiness, because He never does.

**Come meet Him. You cannot share a person you have not met.** And if you’re a believer running on empty, feeling nothing, doubting everything — come too. Your life is hidden with Christ in God, and the Spirit is ready to bring who you are up into your Tuesday.

*Father, You made the hearing ear and the seeing eye, and only You can show us who we are. Thank You for the Gift we could never deserve. Send Your Spirit down into the hidden country of every soul in this room. Rebuild what the world has ruined. Bring who we are in Christ up out of the depths into our everyday lives. And make us springs, Lord — let the forgiveness You gave us spill over onto everyone we know, until they ask to meet the Giver. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

This sermon rests on a full bed of theological research — John Barclay on gifts in the ancient world, Dallas Willard on the renovation of the heart, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig on the soul — with every scripture set out in Greek and ESV. Keep going:

### COMPANION RESEARCH BRIEF

#### **Third World Souls — the Research**

The complete study behind this sermon: Barclay's *Paul and the Gift*, forgiveness as debt-release in the Ancient Near East, Willard's *Renovation of the Heart*, Moreland & Craig on the soul, and the full Greek + ESV scripture thread.

### THE SOUL

#### **The Soul, Hell & the Supreme Ethic of Love**

Moreland, Swinburne, and Molina on what the soul is, why it matters forever, and how God's love protects our freedom.

### DALLAS WILLARD

#### **The Parable of the Rich Fool**

Luke 12 through Willard's eyes — why the soul, not the barn, is the treasure Jesus cares about.

### THE DEBT

#### **The Doctrine of Original Sin**

Romans 5:12 — inherited mortality vs. inherited guilt, and why the debts on your paper are your own, because all sinned.

*“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”*

**3 John 2 (ESV)**