

Wrestle With Soul to Prepare for Easter

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Simple meditation techniques teach people to be aware of the rising and falling of the chest as the lungs expand and contract. Focusing on such a natural process seems silly at first, awkward even. But it has been scientifically proven to have a calming effect. People who meditate and practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer discover reduced stress, peace of mind and a stronger connection to God.

Such disciplines remind us that we are made up of mind, body and spirit. Their combination is referred to as the “soul.”

We are all souls. What kind of soul we become has a lot to do with how well we can objectively see ourselves, embracing the good and seeking to improve what’s not. If we could step out of our skin and observe ourselves through a day, listen to our conversations, watch our body language, notice the way we treat others and how we respond to the way others treat us, we would embrace some aspects of who we are and be appalled by others.

Since we can’t do this, we need to do the next best thing. We need to reach deep inside ourselves and wrestle with our souls—with the very nature of who we are. We do this by learning to be in touch with our mind, our body and our spirit. This takes work. It must be intentional. It requires great discipline.

The gospels show that Jesus wrestled with his soul. He asked himself important questions: “What is my purpose? What should be the next step of my ministry? How should I respond to temptation? What would God have me do? Must I suffer

physically?”

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As the Christian calendar evolved through the centuries, those who sought to follow Jesus noted his disciplines. Lent, the 40-day period prior to Easter, not counting Sundays, has become a time during which the church encourages disciples to get in touch with their souls (i.e., their minds, bodies and spirits). Various disciplines are encouraged. It is a time to prepare for Easter. The disciplines evoked during this season can catapult us through the Easter season and into the season of Pentecost.

Lent reminds us that we are prone to fall away from the disciplines of our faith. Some of us use our minds too little. We don't think through issues. We don't engage in debate. We want spoon-fed Christianity. Others of us neglect our bodies. We forget that our body is the temple of God. We overeat. We under-exercise. For others, we rush head-long into the day without any acknowledgment to God that we need help, guidance and direction. We may rise early for many activities, but how often do we rise early to meet the Lord?

Our lack of discipline says to God, “I can do OK on my own, Lord. If I get in trouble I'll call on you.” This is nothing more than arrogance. Arrogance keeps us from asking important questions of ourselves. Arrogance keeps us from going into our closet and praying. Arrogance keeps us from seeing ourselves objectively.

Humility before God is our best hope of seeing ourselves objectively. When we are humble, we pull away from others in order to draw near to God. We acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, but we go to the One who does. This is the kind of discipline we should seek during the Lenten season.

If we rush through the season without slowing down to look deep into our souls,

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Easter will be just another day; the Easter season will bring no renewal, and the breath of God that blows through the season Pentecost will pass us by. We will scarcely be aware of its presence.

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