

# Soul Care



## Session 4 – Teens



Caretakers of God's Creation

Consistory Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA



When we think about God's creation we naturally tend to think about concrete things – plants, animals, water, air, and so on. But, as we say in the creed, God created everything, "both visible and invisible". One of the most important and precious results of God's creative activity is the human soul.

Our souls are part of God's creation, and so demand our care no less than our bodies do. But what is a soul?

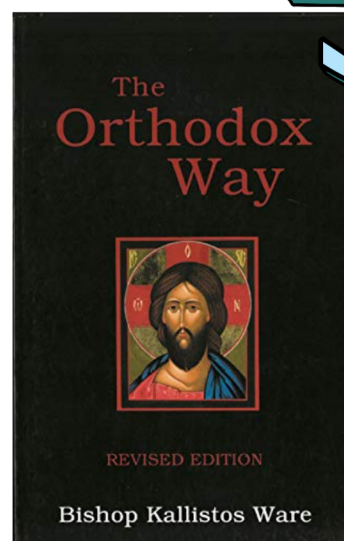
In his wonderful book *The Orthodox Way* Metropolitan Kallistos Ware explains that the soul is "the life-force that vivifies and animates the body, causing it to be not just a lump of matter, but something that grows and moves, that feels and perceives. Animals also possess a soul, and so perhaps do plants. But in man's case the soul is endowed with consciousness; it is a rational soul, possessing the capacity for abstract thought, and the ability to advance by discursive argument from premises to a conclusion . . . Because man has a rational soul and a spiritual intellect, he possesses the power of self-determination and of moral freedom, that is to say, the sense of good and evil, and the ability to choose between them. Where the animals act by instinct, man is capable of making a free and conscious decision."

Each one of us is composed of both an invisible (or immaterial) soul and a visible (or material) body. The soul and body are completely integrated. In other words, every human being possesses both the one and the other. Body and soul influence each other and because, as Metropolitan Kallistos reminds us, our souls are the seat of our self-determination and moral freedom, caring for the health of our souls is no less important than caring for the health of our bodies.

So how do we care for our souls?

Remembering that our souls and bodies influence each other, our "soul care" is like a coin with two sides, the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial.

Our souls require healthy spiritual food, which means prayer, bible reading, and worship. In addition to this "religious" food artistic pursuits like music, literature, dance, or painting; intellectual pursuits like scientific research, academic study, or chess; and athletic pursuits like running, skating, biking, or team sports can "feed our souls."



Adapted for use from Teenage Conference Fr.  
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Doing deeds of mercy or charitable acts is a concrete way of caring not only for our own souls, but the souls of others. We all know the good feeling we derive from helping others, as well as the good feeling we get when others treat us with loving care.



One other concrete way we can care for the health of our souls is by cultivating peace and silence. We live in a hustle-bustle world, with noise all around. It's absolutely amazing how spending even a half-hour a day in silence can refresh our souls.

At the end of this month we will enter the time of the year known as "Great Lent" or "The Great Fast." Most of us probably associate Lent with food. But this is a great mistake. It's not that food isn't important, or that the Church's practice and discipline in regard to what we should or shouldn't eat at various times is simply a matter for personal consideration. Fasting is a means to an end, not an end in itself, as if God is interested in what we eat, not who we are.

Lent is about purifying ourselves spiritually, which means taking care of our souls. Our Lenten services and customs are all geared towards maintaining and strengthening the health of our souls. We receive the anointing on Holy Wednesday evening "for the healing of soul and body." Whether it be through "religious" practices like prayer, worship, fasting, or deeds of mercy, or "secular" practices like reading, hiking, playing sports or enjoying good music, Lent is a time to care for our souls.



St. Ephraim the Syrian is known as a teacher, hymnographer and poet of the church. He is most commonly known for the prayer we use throughout Great Lent, the Prayer of St. Ephraim. Praying, meditating and try to live this prayer are an amazing way for us to care for our souls.

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23)



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### Wrapping it Up! Soul-Care Suggestions:

#### *Praxis – Living our Faith:*

Here are some suggestions of "Caring for our Soul". What are some other ways that you can keep the fast as Caretakers of God's Creation and can incorporate some soul care into the fast.?

- Spend time every day in private prayer. It doesn't need to be a long time, even a couple of minutes is good. The main thing is to have our hearts centered and our thoughts concentrated on joining ourselves to the Lord.
- Spend time in silence every day. This might be going out for a walk or a run or a bike-ride without you ear-buds (and it's usually not a good idea to be listening to music when you're doing this anyway!), having quiet time at home or in the library, sitting in the park, etc.
- Find activities which you enjoy and which engage your imagination. This might be reading good literature, playing or listening to good music, learning about subjects that interest you, painting, dancing, playing chess or other games, etc.
- Participate in charitable or community building activities. Helping out at a food bank, visiting seniors in a nursing home, or joining a service club are all wonderful ways of sharing yourself and your gifts with others.
- Participate in the Lenten services and activities at your parish. Lent functions as a system which requires prayer, worship, deeds of mercy, and fasting. We don't do Lent (or anything else) on our own. Dedicate whatever gifts or talents you have (and you do have gifts and talents) to the parish and help out where needed, whether this be with singing, serving, organizing, cleaning, etc. Even if we only show up and pray we are caring for our own souls and helping others to do the same.

