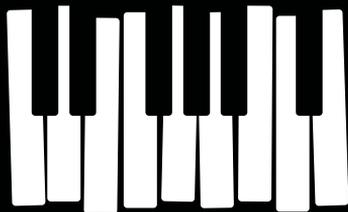


THE PIANO LESSON

by Sharla Fritz



A smiling senior citizen opened the door and let us in. His cropped white hair was a stark contrast against his chocolate-brown skin. He shuffled into his dining room and motioned my husband and me to follow.

"There it is," he announced, pointing to a twenty-year-old Wurlitzer. "It was my wife's piano, but she's been gone these ten years and no one plays it anymore. It's time it goes to a new home."

I ran my hand over the beautiful mahogany finish and pictured his wife carefully polishing the piano every week. *Surely, this piano was loved.*

But when I sat down on the bench and tentatively played a few scales, I cringed. *Ouch. Every note was out of tune.*

"When was the piano last tuned?" I asked. *I think I already know the answer.* "Oh, I don't know," he said. "It's been awhile. But this here piano is just like new. Not been a 150 songs been played on it."

Cute — thinking songs on a piano are like miles on a car.

I was working on a graduate degree in piano performance and desperately needed a piano for my practice sessions. Even though the price was right, my husband and I weren't sure we should buy this instrument. After all, the outside of the instrument had been cared for, but the inside — the part that mattered — had not. Could a little care renovate it to function for its original purpose?

Many of us are like that twenty-year-old Wurlitzer. We spend time taking care of the outside. We go to the hair salon for a cut and color. We sign up for fitness classes. We shop for fashionable clothes.

But we often neglect the important part — the inside.

Paul instructed his protégé, Timothy: *Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things* (1 Timothy 4:16 NASB). Was Paul instructing Timothy to pay attention to the way he looked or to his physical abilities? From the context we can see that is not the case. Earlier in the chapter Paul tells the young pastor *bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things* (1 Timothy 4:8 NASB). Although taking care of our bodies this side of heaven is important, Paul was encouraging Timothy to pay attention to his spiritual part — the part that would live eternally, along with the bodily resurrection.

Jesus also talked about paying attention to the soul: *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?* (Matthew 16:26 ESV).

What is the soul anyway? The Greek word used for soul in Matthew 16 is *psyche*, which means "the vital force which animates the body" and "the seat of feelings, desires, affections." The soul is the part of us that is eternal. It is that element of ourselves that yearns, loves, and makes decisions. John Ortberg, author of the book *Soul Keeping*, writes:

The soul is the coolest, eeriest, most mysterious, evocative, sacred, eternal, life-directing, fragile, indestructible, controversial, expensive dimension of your existence.

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Perhaps we sometimes ignore the soul because it is so mysterious. We can't see it or touch it. We can't take its pulse or check its blood pressure. How can we know when the soul is bruised or injured or malnourished? When we act like that old Wurlitzer piano. When we paste a smile on our face at work but don't feel any joy. When we nod in agreement while our kids talk, but we're not listening. When we go through the motions to sing hymns and listen to the Sunday sermon, but our hearts are far from worship.

Paul told Timothy: *Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; **persevere** in these things* (1 Timothy 4:16 NASB, emphasis mine).

We kept that old Wurlitzer for three years. But it took perseverance, twice-a-year professional tunings, to keep it right. We too must exercise perseverance in our soul care. We must come to the Master Technician often to allow Him to erase the effects of living in the world and to bring our spirits back into harmony with Him.

When we meet with our heavenly Father, He is able to take the discordant notes in our lives and make them ring true once again. He will take our yearnings, our emptiness, our apathy and transform them. He is able to make our souls sing.

Don't neglect the most important part of yourself — the soul. Remember that no matter what you look like on the outside, inside you are a redeemed, loved child of God. The Savior is waiting for you with open arms. He is the One who will restore your aching soul. As you meet Him in the Word, He will take your weariness and emptiness and fill you with His joy and peace. The Holy Spirit will keep your heart in tune with your loving, gracious heavenly Father. **Q**

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