

EXCERPT



Grieving Wholeheartedly
Bringing Healing to Every Part of Your Soul

July 15, 2025 | \$18.99, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1083-9

Dr. Audrey Davidheiser (PhD, Fuller) is a licensed psychologist in California, certified Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapist, and IFSI-approved clinical consultant. After founding a counseling center for the Los Angeles Dream Center, she now provides IFS therapy for trauma survivors, including those with religious trauma, and assists in IFS trainings. She has been a regular writer for Crosswalk.com and columnist for iBelieve.com.

Biblical Foundations for IFS

Does our soul consist of parts? Many in Christendom would respond with a resounding yes. They believe the soul consists of three parts: mind, will, and emotion (Witness Lee, “Dealing with Our Inward Parts for the Growth in Life,” Living Stream Ministry, www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/THE-SOUL-HAVING-THREE-PARTS.html). But with the rise of IFS, perhaps more Christians will allow for multiplicity of the soul beyond this classic definition.

The Creator is fond of utilizing patterns in creation. The most basic example is how the triune God—Father, Son, Spirit—created humans to, likewise, exist in a tripartite form—spirit, soul, body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Both the Old and New Testaments understand humanity as consisting of multiple inner realities. But let’s start our review with the former.

The King James Version’s family of modern translations (such as the ESC, NASB, and NKJV) translate David’s prayer in Psalm 86:11 as “unite my heart to fear Your name.” It was also David who wrote the following: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” (Psalm 103:1 ESV). Why would David ask God to unite his heart if there were not factions in it? Why refer to “all that is within” if his soul consisted of only one solitary section?

But my favorite supporting verse for multiplicity in the Old Testament comes from Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the *brokenhearted*, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (italics added). The original Hebrew for “brokenhearted” is *shabar*, which means to break in pieces (My deep gratitude goes to members of the Christian IFS Facebook group for alerting me to Psalm 103:1 [Karon Ng] and Isaiah 61:1 [Matt Evans]. See <https://biblehum.com/hebrew/7665.htm>). Since grief is the price we pay for love, when our loved ones leave, it makes sense for that departure to shatter our hearts into smithereens (Kenneth J. Doka, *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss* [New York: Atria Books, 2016], chap. 1). Maybe even some shards. These sharp fragments—parts of our soul that react to grief in cutting ways—need our help to facilitate their own grieving.

Jesus: Humans Are Non-Monolithic

Maybe it was just David whose heart needed unity. Who knows, maybe his egregious sins splintered his heart. Or maybe only a grieving heart disintegrates.

Does the New Testament support multiplicity of the soul for everyone? According to Jesus, yes. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 when stating the following to be the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38). Or, according to

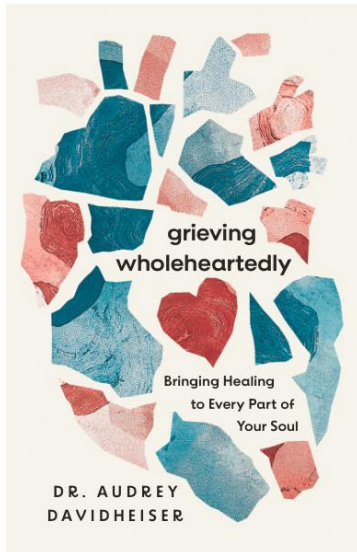


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Mark's Gospel, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

Jesus could have condensed the commandment to a concise "Love the Lord your God." But by detailing our heart, soul, mind, and strength in his response, he lends support to the notion that we are non-unitary beings. His answer also highlights how the components that make up our being have the capacity to operate independently from each other—at least to a degree. It *is* possible to love the Lord with our strength but not necessarily our soul, or vice versa. Otherwise, why would God need to specify we are to love him with all our heart *and* mind *and* soul *and* strength?

Loving God with only some of our existence is not just possible, it is also rampant. Consider, for instance, a volunteer who never misses the chance to help out every time the church is open. Since serving zaps our energy, it is fair to conclude she loves God with all her strength. Then again, if she does so out of desperation—to coax God to heal her father's pneumonia—can she truly claim her service as proof she loves God with her whole heart?

By instructing us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, Jesus supports the notion of humans as non-monolithic beings.

Our soul operates as a system. If one part is grieving, it will affect all the other parts—even if they do not give the appearance of mourning. But when parts that are weighed down with grief are willing to unburden, the relief will permeate the rest of the inner world, freeing parts from having to distance us from our grief.

—Adapted from Chapter 3, "IFS and Christian Faith"



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Californian Psychologist Offers Path for Healing Wholly

If you had to describe Internal Family Systems (IFS) in one sentence, how would you?

Dr. Audrey Davidheiser: IFS is a highly effective therapy modality that shows us how to befriend our own soul and its parts, which paves the way to relieve their burdens, which will then lead to a more fulfilling life.

How did you first learn about IFS?

Davidheiser: I used to direct a counseling center and needed to hire a staff therapist. As part of the interview process, candidates had to present to the graduate students under my leadership. One of them presented a didactic on IFS. Even though it wasn't particularly memorable, hearing the talk alerted me to the modality. A few years later, a daylong IFS workshop was offered near my office. I recognized the theory's name, IFS, from the candidate's presentation, and decided to attend. As I wrote in the book, my experience with IFS at the workshop ended up changing my life.

How has IFS affected you personally?

Davidheiser: This model helped me grieve my father's unexpected death. After learning IFS and becoming certified in it, my entire practice switched from providing psychotherapy based on another modality to only IFS. Since then, my clients have reported amazing development, like how loved ones noticed changes in them. In one case, the change was noticeable after only two sessions; in another case, the client's changes were radical enough that a friend was willing to foot a significant portion of this particular client's therapy fees. My clients seem as thrilled with IFS as I am.

Why do people need this book?

Davidheiser: Grieving is hard. (What if you're still sad after so much time has gone by? Are you doing grief incorrectly? And what do you do with Christmas, when everyone is supposed to be jolly and gift-giving?). In addition, Christians don't always know how to respond to emotions. They can tend to lean on spiritual strategies to escape their grief, which isn't always helpful.

This book invites mourners to look inward as they gently ask parts of their soul, "What do you need to heal?" and listen for the answers. Tending to our soul when it's grieving is how we can achieve lasting relief.



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