

Sermon IV – Pillar Three: Internal Family Systems (IFS)

From Inner Fragmentation to Christ-Centered Wholeness

Jeffrey E Hansen, Ph.D. and Pastor Earl Heverly



Psalm 103:2–3

Let all that is within me praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.

From Bottom-Up Healing to the Renewal of the Inner World

In the first two movements of this journey we began where healing so often must begin, beneath the level of conscious thought, in the body where trauma first takes root and where survival patterns are formed long before we have language for them. We learned that anxiety, depression, addiction, and so much of what we struggle with is not simply a failure of thinking but the expression of a nervous system that adapted to real experiences. Through the lens of Polyvagal-informed therapy we discovered that the body carries the story and that healing begins as the body learns safety, as chronic activation and collapse give way to regulation and connection.

Then we turned to the heart and saw the brilliance of God's design. What the world called a pump, Scripture had already revealed as the center from which life flows. As the heart moves into coherence, the brain quiets its threat circuitry, the mind becomes clearer, and the entire

person becomes more available for relationship with God and with others. The heart becomes a meeting place where physiology and spirituality embrace, where peace is no longer an abstract promise but a lived experience.

The body finds safety and the heart finds rhythm, and as that happens something else becomes possible. The inner world, which for so long had been locked behind layers of protection, begins to open. We are no longer trying to force change through willpower alone. We are now able to bring awareness, compassion, truth, and the leadership of Christ into the psychological system that formed around our wounds. This is the movement from bottom-up healing into the renewal of the mind and the integration of the soul, and it is here that Internal Family Systems becomes such a profound gift.

The Gospel Is the Gathering Together of What Has Been Scattered

For many believers the inner life has felt like a contradiction. We love God and yet feel divided within ourselves. There are moments when faith feels strong and other moments when fear or shame seems to speak louder. There are seasons when obedience flows naturally and others when the very behaviors we long to leave behind reappear with discouraging persistence. Too often we have interpreted this as spiritual failure, when in reality we are living in the tension between two deep realities.

On the one hand there is the fracture that came through original sin, the breaking of communion with God that left the human heart disoriented and searching for life in places that could never give it. On the other hand there are the personal wounds of our own stories, the experiences that shaped our nervous systems, our emotions, and our expectations of relationship. Sin disrupted our union with God, and trauma multiplied that fragmentation within us, pushing vulnerable parts of the soul into hiding and building layers of protection around them.

The Gospel speaks into both realities at once. It does not merely offer forgiveness for what we have done; it restores communion with the One for whom we were created and begins the patient work of gathering together everything inside us that has lived in separation. When the Psalmist cries, *“Let all that is within me praise the Lord,”* he is not describing a life in which every part already agrees. He is proclaiming the hope that every part can be brought into the light of God’s presence and gradually learn to live in harmony under His care.

The Exiles – The Wounded Places That Still Carry the Pain

At the center of this inner landscape are the **Exiles**, the parts of us that still carry the emotional weight of what was too overwhelming when it first occurred. These are the regions of the soul where shame, grief, fear, and loneliness were stored because there was no safe place for them to be expressed. They often hold the perspective of the age at which the wound took place,

which is why certain moments in the present can suddenly feel as though we have been transported into an earlier season of our lives.

These exiled places are not signs of weakness. They are signs that we endured more than we were meant to endure alone. And because their pain felt so intense, other parts of us learned to keep them out of awareness. Yet the longing of the Gospel is always toward these very places. The Christ who said that He came to bind up the brokenhearted is moving toward the exiles, not away from them, and when His presence reaches them the shame they carry begins to loosen and their isolation begins to give way to connection.

The Managers – The Protectors That Learned to Stay in Control

Surrounding those vulnerable places are the **Managers**, the parts of us that organized life around the prevention of further pain. They are the planners, the achievers, the perfectionists, the people pleasers, the hyper-responsible ones, and even the spiritual performers. They learned early that control created a sense of safety, and so they gave themselves to the work of keeping everything in order.

Over time we came to think of these parts as simply who we are. Yet when we look with compassion we see how tirelessly they have labored and how little rest they have known. They are not enemies of healing; they are guardians that have been standing watch for years, trying to keep us from ever having to feel what once overwhelmed us.

The Firefighters – The Emergency Responders of the Soul

And when the pain of the exiles begins to break through despite the managers' efforts, the **Firefighters** move into action. They are concerned not with long-term outcomes but with immediate relief. Their assignment is to extinguish emotional fire as quickly as possible, and they will use whatever strategy seems most effective in the moment. What we have called addiction, compulsion, rage, numbing, withdrawal, or dissociation often began as an attempt to survive an internal flood.

When we begin to see this clearly, the harsh self-hatred that once accompanied these behaviors starts to soften. Even here we recognize an effort to live.

The Inner Critic – Conviction and Condemnation

Within the system of the managers there is often a powerful voice we have long mistaken for the voice of God. It is the **Inner Critic**, and in its healthy form it can call us toward growth and responsibility. But when it becomes distorted by shame it becomes condemning and relentless.

The Holy Spirit convicts in order to restore relationship.

The accuser condemns in order to sever it.

The Spirit speaks with clarity and hope.

The condemning voice attacks identity and leaves us in despair.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The Self – Restored Through Union With Christ

Classical IFS speaks of a centered **Self** that leads the system with calm, compassion, and clarity. The NeuroFaith® vision carries that insight into the full light of the Gospel, because the true center of the human person is not discovered through insight alone but restored through union with Christ. We are not simply wounded people trying to become integrated. We are new creations in whom the life of Jesus is being formed, and as His life becomes the organizing presence within us, the entire inner world begins to take on a different atmosphere.

When the Self is leading, eight qualities emerge with remarkable consistency: calm, curiosity, clarity, compassion, confidence, courage, creativity, and connectedness. They describe a soul that is no longer driven by fear but guided by presence. Scripture describes that same transformation in different language, calling it the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are not behaviors we manufacture. They are the life of Christ being formed within us.

As that life takes its rightful place at the center, the managers are finally able to rest, the firefighters are no longer forced into emergency action, and the exiles are no longer alone. The inner world begins to experience what it was created for — not conflict, but communion.

A House Fully Alive With the Presence of God

As this work of Christ unfolds within us, the prayer of the Psalmist begins to move from poetry into lived experience. *“Let all that is within me praise the Lord.”* What was once divided slowly learns to live in harmony. The parts of us that carried fear are no longer forced to hide, the parts that labored to protect are finally able to rest, and the places that held shame are brought into the light of mercy. The inner world that once felt like a battlefield becomes, over time, a dwelling place.

This is the miracle of redemption, that God does not merely forgive us from a distance but makes His home within us. The body that once lived in survival begins to discover what it means to be still. The heart that once moved in chaos finds a new rhythm of peace. The mind that once raced with accusation becomes quiet enough to hear the gentle voice of the Spirit. And the soul that felt scattered across years of pain and performance is gathered into a living communion under the lordship of Christ.

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Scripture tells us, *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16). This is not a metaphor meant only for theology; it is the lived reality of healing. Every exile welcomed, every protector relieved of its burden, every condemning voice silenced by grace becomes another room in that temple filled with light.

So the invitation tonight is not to strive for wholeness through effort, but to yield to the One who is already moving through every layer of your being. Christ does not stand at the surface waiting for you to fix yourself. He walks into the deepest rooms of the soul, into the memories that still ache, into the defenses that never learned to rest, into the places where you learned to live without hope, and He speaks peace there.

And as His presence settles, something holy begins to happen. What once reacted now responds. What once hid now comes forward. What once lived in isolation begins to sing.

Until, slowly and truthfully, all that is within you blesses His name.

Not because every struggle has vanished, but because every part has found its center in Him.

This is the house fully alive with the presence of God.

This is the soul becoming a sanctuary.

This is what it means to be healed.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

Amen.