

Course Leader Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

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Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Lesson 1 Study Guide

CC202

SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

The Key Concepts in SoulCare: Review and
Introduction to Building on Them

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Objectives

In this lesson, you will review the ten key concepts of the Basic Model of SoulCare taught in SoulCare Foundations I. When you complete this lesson, you should have a grasp of the biblical foundations necessary for understanding people and their problems.

When you complete this lesson, “The Key Concepts in SoulCare: Review and Introduction to Building on Them,” you should be able to:

- Articulate the powerful potential of SoulCare related to the release of spiritual passion.
- Describe ways in which a SoulCare provider can engage in the development of spiritual wisdom.
- Express a genuine curiosity about people, their problems, and their motivations.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson One: The Key Concepts in SoulCare: Review and Introduction to Building on Them

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

An obvious thought recently struck me. Every day, all over the world, people are engaged in conversation. People are talking to each other. Now, just imagine for a moment, what would happen if a few people, followers of Jesus, as they engaged in conversation, began thinking well about the people with whom they were talking.

Suppose people, as they interacted with others, cared deeply about the souls of people they were chatting with. Suppose they became very intentional in their conversations. What would happen if their concern for other people's souls were both well informed biblically and blatantly supernatural? What would happen if there was a passion coming out of one person's soul as he was talking to another, as she was talking to another, and this passion that was coming out was literally the passion of God, the passion of the Holy Spirit? And what would happen if, as they were talking with somebody else, they became aware of a wisdom that allowed them to think about the souls of the people that they were talking with?

We're talking about a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare. And I envision, all over the world, people having supernatural conversations. I envision, all over the world, people becoming Word and Spirit people—people who think biblically about life, people who think biblically about themselves, about each other, and about what is really happening in us as we live our lives, as we bump into problems and experience heartache.

Do we know what it means to think biblically? What would happen if you were thinking biblically about the nature of the journey as you were talking to somebody else as they shared what was happening in their journey? What would happen if the passions that were coming out of you were the passions of the Lord, the passions of the Spirit? I'm trusting that because of this course in SoulCare, that we'll see a revolution starting with me and you, and a few other followers of Jesus all across the world, people who become people of the Word, who understand what the Word says about the interior world of each of us, and people of the Spirit, people who know what it means to be prompted by the Spirit and to release the very passions of God into the lives of each other.

That's why I'm teaching this course in SoulCare. I want to see a third reformation. The first reformation in the early days of the church established the doctrine of the Trinity and helped us see that God himself is an eternal community and that nothing matters in all the world quite as much as how we relate. Relationships are central to life. That's what the first reformation, thousands of years ago, taught us from the nature of the Trinity. The second reformation, the one we're most familiar with, sparked by Martin Luther, made clear the doctrine of justification and helped us see that God offers an unbreakable relationship with Himself as a gift, but a costly gift; it cost Him the life of His son. The time is ripe, I believe for another reformation, for a third reformation, for another awakening, for a revival if you will.

This reformation, this next revolution that I'm envisioning has to do with how we think about sanctification. We need to understand what is happening beneath the surface of people's lives; we need to understand why we're having so much trouble changing; why we're so miserable much of the time; why so many of our lives are lived full of pressure; why we don't feel intimate with many people; why we're not deeply connected; why our church experience is so often an experience of disconnect as opposed to connect; we need to know what's happening inside of people's lives and we need to know how the Spirit is working in the souls of God's people to change us—because we better see what's going on in us, and what the Spirit is doing, and we'll better see what we can do, how we can provide SoulCare for each other when we talk with each other, and maybe we'll get a different kind of conversation going, when friends meet for coffee, when people take a long drive together, maybe even in the few minutes in between church and Sunday school. What kind of conversations are possible? Well-informed, supernatural conversations that change people's lives; that's what SoulCare is about and that's what this course is all about.

This is the second course on the topic of SoulCare, and I want to spend this first presentation reviewing what I said in the first course. In the first course we talked about foundations of SoulCare, a basic model. And if you've not seen that course then it'd be wise to go back and to take a look at it.

I want to review all that I said, very briefly, in the previous course. I want to give you what I believe are ten key concepts that form the foundation for all of our thinking about SoulCare. So, let me review these ten key concepts and then we'll move into the second course—the substance of the second course which is no longer looking at the basic model (that's course one), but now building on the ten key concepts of the basic model, asking ourselves the question: how do we understand people? We know we want to enter the battle for people's, souls we want to get in their interior worlds. How can we understand people and their problems? That's course number two.

Let me concisely, and I hope simply, review the ten key concepts that we talked about in course one. Concept number one, key concept number one can be summarized with two words: turning chairs. Perhaps you recall the image of people so often sitting facing, not each other, but facing away from each other and so often we sit on porches, metaphorically, and we never turn our chairs to face each other and get to know each other. The first key concept is we've got to turn our chairs because every one of us longs for a kind of relationship where we're deeply known, where we're richly explored, where we're profoundly discovered, and where we're powerfully touched. You and I long, we can't help it, we're image bearers, we bear the image of a Trinitarian God who Himself is involved in a perfect relationship, and because we bear His image, we long for a certain kind of relationship where we want to be known without rejection, where we want to be explored with real curiosity, where we want to be discovered with excitement.

Isn't it something when somebody is talking with you and discovers something about who you really are, and their eyes just go wide, and their souls begin to jump and there's a sense in which you feel, "My gosh you're seeing something in me that excites you. That's incredible; I didn't know anything was in me that was that exciting." Imagine conversations where we're known, explored, discovered, and then touched. Where another person moves into our lives with the power of the Spirit. Most often we relate superficially; most often we're involved in

relationships, sometimes in our small groups, where after years of being in a small group or being in a relationship, we don't feel all that well-known. We've hardly ever been explored; there's such little curiosity about each other's lives—what's really happening—we simply catch up and never move more deeply. There's no real discovery of what's unique about us, who we really are; we're not touched and released to be who God has called us to be. Key concept number one: turning chairs.

A vision, a longing, what could be in community. Key concept number two is a compelling vision. As we enter each other's lives—as I get to know you, as you get to know me, as two people have lunch together, as a small group meets—as we begin to enter each other's lives, it's possible to enter each other's lives with a confident hope that something unbelievably wonderful is going to happen. It's possible to enter each other's lives even when we hear somebody talk about incredible difficulties. As I was chatting just very recently with a brother in Christ, who, as he put it, his life is unraveling. His comment to me was, "My life is absolutely unraveling." Is it possible for me to hear a man in the middle of incredible struggle and feel an excitement because there's a compelling vision that the Spirit gives me as I talk with him? What is the compelling vision that is possible? That's key concept number two. And the compelling vision really can be reduced to this: not that your problems are going to go away, not that your wife who's having an affair is going to repent and come back and you have a wonderful marriage (if that takes place, praise God in joy); not that your kids are going to be all that you want them to be (if they're walking with the Lord, celebrate God's grace in your life); not that health is going to be returned (if it is, again, praise God), but the compelling vision is not that you'll have a better life, the compelling vision is that there's a better hope. That in the core of my being there's an appetite for God that because of the way we connect, that appetite can be stirred to the point where it becomes stronger than every other appetite. For that no matter what is happening in my life, no matter what difficulties I am facing, that I really want to know God with passion, interest, excitement, desperateness. The compelling vision is: maybe because of our conversations, we can want God more than we want any lesser blessing. Key concept number two: compelling vision.

Key concept number three: inside look. In order to stir that appetite, in order to begin connecting, to turn our chairs and to move toward this compelling vision, in order for the kind of reformation that I have in mind to actually take place, a reformation in how we grow to become more like Christ together; in order for all these wonderful things I'm talking about to actually happen, there's a bit of a hitch to the process—it's tough. The process begins by getting very, very honest about who we are; the process begins by no longer looking at our own lives, or the lives of each other superficially. The process begins with an inside look. The process begins by entering the depths of each other's souls; something we're terrified to do. I don't want to let you in because I'm not sure you're going to like what you see and I'm not sure what you're going to do with what you see. Are you going to judge me, get mad at me, give me a kind of sympathy, which will irritate me? Are you just going to give me hugs and I'm going to feel condescended to? I'm not sure if I want you to see me, so the inside look that is required is very difficult, very risky and, for that reason, is rarely taken.

But we're going to have to look beneath the appearances. We're going to have to go beneath social chatter; beneath what we normally let others see into the reality of who we are. If this idea of SoulCare is going to become a reality as opposed to a lovely thought, if SoulCare is going to

actually grip the church, and make the church into the dynamic place it was meant to be, then we're going to have to face the reality of our own insides. The good, and there is good if you're a believer—if you aren't a believer there's incredible potential for good, there's uniqueness—but, whoever you are, believer, unbeliever, there's not only something that's good, or something that's potentially good, but there's things that are bad, and there's things that are downright ugly. You've got to face the good, the bad, and the ugly as the saying goes. Jesus put it very clearly when He said we're never going to clean the outside of the cup and dish until we attend to what's inside the cup and dish. We've got to take a deep look. We've got to see what's really happening inside and only when that gets dealt with supernaturally will our outsides ever be what they need to be. We've got to clean the inside. What's going on beneath the surface as we turn our chairs toward each other? What do we see that's going on that requires an inside look?

Key concept number four: ruling passions. When we look inside ourselves, when I look inside of me, the first thing we're primarily looking for is to see what passions are ruling within my heart, within my soul. What am I motivated by at this moment? Just very recently I was engaged in a conversation with somebody in front of a class that I am teaching on the topic of spiritual direction and SoulCare. And as I sat in front of the class that I've been teaching for a number of weeks to actually engage in the process that I've been talking about, what passions do you suppose were ruling in me? Was there some passion that was saying, "I better show these people I know what I am doing? I've been teaching about this I better handle this well. By the time this conversation is over, everybody in this room better be impressed with how good I am at this." Is that the kind of passion that's inside of me? If it is it's ugly. It isn't a passion of love. It isn't a passion of the Spirit. It's the passion of being a people pleaser. It's the passion of being an idolater.

You've got to discern what the ruling passions are within us. Are we consumed by a love, by a divine love? Is there a reality to this participation in the divine nature that releases out of me a care, a love, a burden, a desire, for representing Christ well? Does that dominate in me as I talk with somebody else versus trying to look good or think of something intelligent to say, or coming up with something brilliant and impressing other people? Is there a dominant passion that says, "I want to represent my Lord well. I want people to see what He is like because of my involvement with Him, and I want this person to be blessed, I want this person to be drawn to the Lord Jesus"? Is that my ruling passion? That's the second topic. What are the ruling passions that are within us? Are they of the spirit or are they of the flesh?

Key concept number five: this is really hard—the concept of brokenness. An honest look inside of our souls, our ruling passions, at why a husband walks in the door a few minutes late, sees a scowl on his wife's face and goes over and gives her a big hug and a kiss—when he looks at his real ruling passion, is he looking to bless his wife or is he looking to occupy her mouth with something other than a scolding from her to him? Is there a passion within to control, to keep him out of trouble, "if I give her a kiss maybe she'll get off my back"?

An honest look at our inside passions is never flattering, because we realize how easily and how often we disguise our self-preoccupation in attractive clothing. We realize how often what we're really committed to is not God and not somebody else; we're not loving God or loving others, we're really burdened about our own well being and we're doing that which takes care of ourselves and

when we start seeing what's happening inside of us there's a brokenness because we're facing things that we don't know how to change. It's just who we seem to be; we feel helpless, we feel hopeless in the middle of recognizing what is happening inside of us. Our need for power in people's lives, our desire to impact other people, we disguise in attractive clothing and we call it the passion to bless, the passion to help, when in fact all we're doing is looking to be powerful.

When you really see what's happening inside of you, when I see what's happening inside of me, there's something that just is desperate. Call it brokenness. The realization that I am not who God longs for me to be, and I cannot be who God longs for me to be, and who I long to be. I cannot be who I long to be, who I was designed to be, without supernatural help. I'm broken, I'm dependent, I'm desperate, and I simply come before God and say, "This is the mess you have to work with. Is there any grace that you can help me with in my time of desperate need?" The experience of brokenness is required for SoulCare. That's so important because too often we think of things like SoulCare or Christian counseling, or spiritual direction as a series of techniques to learn and to master, and it's not that at all. We need to become broken. And in our brokenness you realize that you don't measure up to God's standard of love, and as a result, a brokenness sets in that leads us to confess our moral inadequacy and our absolute dependency. Brokenness, the fifth key concept.

The sixth key concept that we talked about in course number one: self-need versus soul-thirst. Self-need, needs revolving around me and my desire to feel good about myself, versus the deepest thirst of my soul. What do I long for in the presence of God versus what do I really want from other people so I can feel good about myself? Self-need versus soul-thirst. We want to feel good about ourselves, and when that want, when that desire to feel good about ourselves is central, that want becomes a demand that I choose to call self-need. When we engage with others out of self-need, it seems reasonable to us—after all, we want to feel good about ourselves, what's wrong with not wanting to hurt, what's wrong with feeling better?—and so we use each other to see to it that we feel good in the presence of each other. There's a demand that our needs be met. There's a movement towards other people that we might disguise under the rubric of SoulCare, but, in fact, as we're relating to each other what's really happening is I'm demanding that this conversation go in a way that my needs for self-esteem are met and when that's my approach to relationships there's no humility and there's no power; the Spirit is quenched and no real SoulCare takes place. It's illegitimate. And it ruins any effort at SoulCare. Out of self-need arises bad ruling passions.

In a hunger to know God, a hunger to become like the Lord, a hunger to relate intimately and deeply with people for the glory and the pleasure of God, and for the blessing in the growth of others, that's what I mean by soul-thirst. There's something very deep inside of my soul, a core energy that longs to be more like God, that longs to know Him, that longs to encounter Him, that longs to honor Him. That's soul-thirst, and when that thirst of the deepest part of the human soul is dominant within my life, that's where the good ruling passions come from. So our sixth key concept is self-need versus soul-thirst.

Key concept number seven: curiosity and vision. Out of self-need comes a desire to analyze people. I want to feel bright, I want to feel competent, I want to feel adequate, I want to know what I am doing, and I want you to know that I know what I am doing so out of self-need, the desire for me to look good, I am going to figure you out, I'm going to analyze, I'm going to take

courses in counseling that will give me the kind of insight I need to satisfy my own needs. Out of self-need comes a desire to analyze people, and a passion to change people.

It's pretty tough when you're looking to be in a relationship with somebody who's struggling, to relate to them in a way that they won't feel any impact. There's no power, and so out of self-need comes a desire to make an impact that says because of what I am doing I want you to be better. Are you changing, are you growing, are you different because of me? Happens all the time. That's a desire to analyze; it is the exact opposite of what I mean by curiosity.

When you share something with me, if I'm operating out of soul-thirst then there's going to be a profound curiosity within me that's not going to try to figure you out, that's not going to analyze you, but that's going to be very, very eager to know you. I'm going to be just attracted to the fact that here's a human being and I get to enter their lives a little bit; man I'd love to know what's happening in you. If you give me the privilege, I'd love to explore all that's going on in your soul. I'm not here to analyze and figure you out and put you in a diagnostic box and give you ten techniques that will make you better by tomorrow, I just want to explore what's happening and because I believe in God, and because I believe in the Gospel of Christ, and because I believe in the indwelling Holy Spirit, I want to discover how God is working in your heart right now, what a thrill to see God present in your heart, in the middle of all that's bad. And then, might it be possible that what is alive within me might come out and touch you? Is there a curiosity that says I want to enter the battle for your soul; I want to know, explore, discover and touch? And as I do that, is there a confidence that God is moving you in a direction? Is there an excitement within me that says that as I'm curious about you, I know that God is moving you towards something? I'm curious about the presence of God in your life, and I'm excited about the movement of God in your life. Curiosity and vision. When is the last time you had a conversation with somebody who was deeply curious about you and held a high vision about how God was working in your life? Key concept number seven.

Key concept number eight: wisdom. Effective SoulCare requires not only the Spirit's passion—it certainly requires that—it requires not only the Spirit's passion ruling in our heart, leading to expressing soul-thirst, through curiosity and vision and all these earlier concepts; in addition to the Spirit's passion ruling in our hearts we really need to have the Spirit's wisdom as revealed in the Scriptures to guide us as we enter the soul of another.

One of the things that happens, and I'm sure you've experienced this as you've had conversations with people, you know that you get pretty confused sometimes. Somebody shares that they're feeling dry spiritually; somebody shares that they just can't get close to their husband; somebody shares that their child is at odds with them and they don't know how to break the bind and you're sitting there saying, "I don't know how to understand this; I don't have any wisdom about this."

I suggest that for effective SoulCare to happen we need to have a roadmap. We need to know what we're looking for when we pull back the surface and enter into the depths of somebody's soul. We need to have a roadmap to give us some indication of what we can expect to find of what's most important to find, and what to do with what we find. We need wisdom as we move into the murky depths of a person's hidden interior world. And because we need wisdom, in course number one I sketched a basic strategy, I sketched out a basic model that hopefully we can keep in mind as we

engage with each other; not in a way that eliminates naturalness, not in a way that makes us live by a technique, but in a way that kind of guides us with the wisdom of the Scriptures. Key concept number eight: wisdom.

Key concept number nine: reframing. Put a frame around something else, than what we normally put a frame around. When we're engaged in conversations of SoulCare, what often happens is this: somebody will make known a journeying reality, some reality in their journey to God, something that's happening in their life and it's hard perhaps, and we put the frame around that and we say, "Let's talk about that. Can we solve this problem?"

Effective SoulCare shifts the focus to something more important than the immediate reality. It doesn't ignore the importance of the fact that you just discovered you had cancer; it doesn't ignore the importance of the reality that you just lost your job and you can't pay your bills; it doesn't ignore that, but it says if we're going to experience the power of God in the middle of dealing with these journeying realities, we're going to have to reframe and think about something else. We're going to have to shift our attention to the story of the soul, not to the specific reality of the journey. We need to shift our attention to the story of the soul and to encourage people to enter their own story and to take an inside look to see their deepest story and to understand what's happening in parts of their lives that most of us rarely attend to. In SoulCare conversations the topic shifts from what happened yesterday and how do you handle it to what's going on in your life more deeply, beneath the surface what's happening: reframing.

Key concept number ten: the power of SoulCare. With all my heart I believe, because of what the Scriptures teach, that you and I can become agents of the Spirit to stir people from where they are to where they could be and where they long to be. We can become agents of the Spirit to actually encourage meaningful movement by understanding the root problem, by identifying the real battle in somebody's soul, by exposing what's wrong and what's difficult in a way that a person responds with, "Yeah, that's what I do but that's not what I want." And then to touch the life that is in another person in a way that releases it; the result is power.

Ten basic concepts of a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare—that was course number one, that's the foundation for understanding people and problems which we'll begin to look at in presentation number two.

Discussion Questions

In three or four sentences, write down your understanding of each concept.

1. *Turning chairs* toward one another so that souls meet.
2. *Compelling vision* for one another that makes you excited about what the Lord can do.
3. *Inside look* that sees the good, the bad, and the ugly beneath a person's outward appearance.
4. *Ruling passions*—those motives that guide the SoulCare provider as he or she provides SoulCare.
5. *Brokenness*—the realization that self-interest competes with love as we provide SoulCare.
6. *Self-Need*—the desire to feel good about one's self that obscures soul-thirst, the longing to know God and reveal Him to others.
7. *Curiosity and vision* that replace analysis and control with a desire to know another and to see that person become more like Jesus.
8. *Wisdom* from the Bible that tells us what to look for as we enter another's soul.
9. *Reframing* from external concerns to internal concerns.
10. *The power of SoulCare*—the conviction that God could use me to make a real difference in another person's life.

Lesson 2 Study Guide

CC202

SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

A New Paradigm:
SoulCare as Our Greatest Need

Updated 2015



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Christian University

Objectives

In this lesson, you will delve into the word *paradigm* and study the importance of knowing which paradigm you depend on as you seek to understand people and their problems.

When you complete this lesson, “A New Paradigm: SoulCare as Our Greatest Need,” you should be able to:

- Honor the legitimate place of biological/chemical/neurological causes of human struggles but not let their *legitimate place* dislodge the *central place* of spirit and soul issues in understanding people.
- Be able to distinguish among “brain-soul” problems, “soul-brain” problems, and “mostly soul” problems.
- Understand the deficiencies of both the standard *professional* paradigm and the increasingly popular *biological* paradigm for understanding people and their problems.
- Consider thoughtfully the *spiritual* paradigm as you engage in SoulCare.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Two: A New Paradigm: SoulCare as Our Greatest Need

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

Understanding people and problems—we need a new paradigm, a paradigm that tells us that what all of us long for and what we need if we are going to change is SoulCare. Now, to get us started in thinking about, you and me thinking about people and the kinds of problems that we all have, I want you to start thinking with me about three kinds of problems that we do struggle with. And I want to label them very, very simply.

I want to talk about the first kind of a problem as a problem that I want to call a brain/soul problem. A problem that is primarily brain related physiological and secondarily soul involved. Soul, as a secondary concern—brain problems, physical problems and then soul problems.

Secondly I want you to think about problems that are more primarily soul concerns but also have something to do with how our brain is functioning, our brain chemistry, so call those soul/brain problems: first brain/soul, secondly soul/brain.

And then thirdly, the kind of problems that I suggest are most common and the kind of problems this course deals with more than the first two, although this course is application to one and two, but the third I simply want to call mostly soul concerns. Three kinds of problems.

Think first of all about brain/soul problems. I remember working years ago with Stella. Stella was a 26-year-old woman who heard voices, a twenty-six-year-old woman who, most of the time smiled very pleasantly and very meaninglessly; there was no point to the smile, there was no precipitant. She didn't smile when somebody flattered her, she smiled if you told her she was ugly; she smiled if you told her she was beautiful; she just smiled meaninglessly all the time.

Still, I had a far more serious problem than a pointless smile. She also regularly cut herself with a knife. She was involved in self-mutilation. Stella was diagnosed as schizophrenic. And most of the people who knew Stella—the professionals, the non-professionals, her parents, I was involved in Stella's treatment for a time—most of us believed that there was something fundamentally wrong, not with Stella's soul only, but more primarily something was wrong with the way her brain was working. Something was wrong with the brain chemistry; something was wrong with the functioning of her physiological apparatus. Stella had a very real physical disease, a disease I believe that's as real as diabetes, a disease that's as real as cancer, and requires professional medical treatment.

But Stella not only had a brain disorder, but Stella still had a soul. She was still a woman who bore the image of God, who longed to be known and explored and discovered and touched, who longed to be loved, and affirmed and have a place in this world. All that was there but she really

couldn't get to that without some form of medical treatment. That's what I mean by a brain/soul problem—keep that kind of problem in your mind. She needed hospitalization perhaps. She was hospitalized for a significant length of time. She needed medication but she also needed SoulCare. It would be a mistake to think that all Stella needed was SoulCare. But it would be maybe an even more horrible mistake to look at Stella as nothing more than a brain problem, where it didn't matter whether the nurses who [attended to] her treated her with dignity and respect.

She had a brain disorder, no question, and needed medical help. But she was a soul who needed SoulCare. Providing SoulCare for people like Stella is a very high calling. People that are struggling like that are difficult to reach, but can we believe that in the middle of their struggles there still is a soul that requires care? Brain/soul problems.

Secondly, soul/brain problems. Marie came to me because she was severely depressed. I worked with her for some time, and she said to me over and over again that she hated herself, she saw no value to her life, that she wished that she were dead. She was lonely, she was stuck in a job that she just couldn't stand and she had memories of a violent childhood. Her mood was so dark from all the struggles that she had endured and all the horrors that life had afflicted upon her soul, on her life. [Marie] had sunk into a very, very deep depression.

But I don't believe SoulCare at its richest had a chance of fully reaching meaningfully. But I believe in Marie's case we are talking about Marie, that in Marie's case I believe it was very, very appropriate for Marie to be taking anti-depressant medication. Because there were some things happening within her physical apparatus that were not what they should be and medication was able to blunt some of the darkness and to take away some of the incredible hopeless feelings.

But it would have been a severe mistake for Marie to assume that a pill solved the root problem. Just like Stella, who really did have a major brain disorder, Marie has a soul. Stella had a soul. And Stella's need for SoulCare, I suggest is primary, but supported perhaps by anti-depressant medication. Medication actually relieved her struggles enough to do the work of SoulCare. Her core problem had to do with the soul, but her struggles to cope with so many difficulties in her life changed perhaps her brain chemistry in such a way that medication was an appropriate thing to do.

As a third kind of problem, and this is perhaps the most common, this is the category of difficulty that I'm directing most of my comments toward. I think what I'm saying about SoulCare has strong application to the Stellas of this world with brain/soul problems, and to the Maries of this world with soul/brain problems, that every one of us, me, you, even if our brains are functioning fairly well, even if there is no physiological organic basis for mood swings if we're not diagnosed as bipolar people who, because of brain chemistry, go way up and way down; in the absence of all that, all of us have struggles with soul issues.

I talked to Doug, at some length over the course of several years. Doug is a pastor. His wife left him, a few years ago, and when his wife left him, his church responded by firing him (rightly or wrongly is another question we're not looking at). But he had to deal with the fact that his church no longer wanted him, and his kids—for whom he lost custody and stay as involved as he could—his kids became very rebellions and pretty much rejected Christianity. He got into drugs.

In his own discouragement with his own pain he found that doing a little bit of illicit drug activity relieved his pain and made him feel better.

He came to me actually, not struggling with depression, not struggling with the unfairness of life, but he came to me because of an addiction to pornography. He found himself vulnerable to sexual temptations because of all that was happening in his life. And pornography had become an addiction—something that he had lost power to control, that he was involved with almost all the time. He was terrified; Doug was terrified when he thought about the future. “What does tomorrow hold? All I feel is despair, all I feel is frustration, all I feel is sadness, all I feel is gloom, all I feel is anger, and I don’t know what to do about that. The best I can do with handling all the pain in my life is to do things I know I shouldn’t do: pornography, drugs—my life is a mess.”

In the course of our first conversation I said to him something like this, I said, “Doug, God did not put you on earth primarily for the purpose of being happily married. If that’s the reason He put you on earth and He’s let you down, or you’ve messed it up so bad, or your wife, your ex-wife has ruined the prospects for this, and the whole purpose of your life is gone, then I don’t see any alternative other than drugs and sex; why not? God did not put you on earth centrally to be happily married. He didn’t put you on earth centrally to enjoy your role as a father. He didn’t put you on earth centrally to lead a church toward kingdom purposes. He has you here for one central purpose, and Doug as I say it to you, this might sound anemic, it might sound like I am indulging in cliché, it might have no power in your life, but it’s true. God put you on earth to glorify Him. God put you on earth so that in the middle of divorce, in the middle of rebellious kids, in the middle of lost ministry, that you could say to the world, ‘There still is a God Who’s worth trusting. His character is such that He is a rock in the middle of the storm, that He is an anchor in the middle of the waves that are rolling over my soul, and I still trust Him, I still believe Him, so look at my life and all that I have gone through and all the sorrows I feel and all the trials that I have faced, and all the failure that is my own, and in the middle of all that, my confidence is in Him.’ And if people can look at you and say, ‘Isn’t God something?’ you fulfilled the purpose of your life. Are you willing to move in that direction with me because that’s going to be the work of spiritual direction. That is going to be the work of SoulCare.”

In my conversation with Doug, a man whose problems were mostly soul problems, we didn’t worry about anti-depressant medication, we didn’t worry about anti-psychotic medication, we worried about the real issues in his soul and our conversation with Doug, my vision for Doug remained clear. I wanted to see Doug’s appetite for knowing God, for enjoying God and for revealing God; I wanted to see Doug’s appetite for God become experienced within his own being as stronger than every other appetite. As stronger than the appetite to have his marriage restored; as stronger than his appetite to have his kids come back to God and to have a good relationship with Him; stronger than his appetite for good ministry.

Folks that is one tall order. When you have a vision for that kind of thing in the middle of these kinds of trials, how else can you feel but inadequate? Because you are asking for a miracle, and no skill through psychotherapy, no clever spiritual direction, no rich encouragement from a brother who cares is going to do the job. This is going to require the Spirit. If Doug is in the middle of all that, is going to actually experience a desire for God that’s stronger than all the legitimate blessings that he desires and has lost. It would be a terrible mistake, in working with Doug, to aim

only for Doug to feel better. Of course you want him to feel better; I like feeling good and when I feel good I rejoice in that. Make that your highest aim and you're a hedonist. Live for whatever brings you those good feelings and you're an idolater. And although you want Doug to feel better, you've got to be aiming towards something far higher; what's your vision for Doug? Doug needs SoulCare.

What if someone is seriously disturbed and in the psychiatric hospital and on strong medication? What if someone is hurting so badly that medication is necessary to provide sufficient relief for that person to think clearly? And whether someone is struggling with life, in the sometimes difficult world, to terrible points of despair, the point that I want you to hear me make is everybody needs SoulCare.

What do we need to understand in order to move into Stella's life, and into Marie's life, and maybe more commonly, into Doug's life? What do we need to understand about Stella, Marie, and Doug? What do we need to realize is true about them as people? Who are they as human beings and how did they get in so many problems—how do so many problems develop in Stella's, Marie's and Doug's life, and in mine?

How to begin this presentation, as we think about these three kinds of problems focusing on mostly soul problems? I'd begin by suggesting that how we think about people and their problems determine what we believe needs to be done. As you are talking with Doug, as you are talking with Sally and Bill and Frank and Sue, as you are talking with ordinary people in your life or maybe the people in the hospitals, as you're talking with people, what is your understanding of who they are and how problems developed? What are the paradigms? What is the way of thinking that you have that leads you in how you interact with them?

Well I want to suggest that there are two common paradigms that our culture has bought into and I want to suggest a very different paradigm. But let me, to be clear on what I am suggesting, let me first present to you the way I think many times most of us think in our modern culture.

Let me talk first about what I call the standard paradigm, the most common paradigm. It's a paradigm that is rooted in enlightenment thinking. It's a paradigm that's rooted in enlightenment optimism—the idea that if we think hard enough, we really can solve every problem. If we can do the right research, we can cure Stella of her psychoses; if we come up with the right medications, we can take care of Marie with her depression; if we understand how psychotherapy works, we can deal with Doug and get him to feel whole and good about himself no matter what's happened in his life. We can solve problems.

The standard paradigm is: let's figure it out and let's see to it how, in fact, we can take care of problems. Here's what we do; what we do is we take these three kinds of problems; brain/soul problems, put them on one end; we take soul/brain problems and put those in the middle; and then we take mostly soul problems, and put them on this end and then what we do is we take the word *soul* and change it to the word *self*. We take the word *soul* and we change it to the word *self*. We redefine our problems as brain (physiological)/self (psychological) problems; we redefine soul/brain problems as self problems (psychotherapeutically treatable), and brain problems (medication might be appropriate), and we deal with mostly self problems and we assume that what we really

need is not rich conversations that depend on the Spirit of Christ, not wisdom that the Bible reveals. We are not dealing with the soul—that’s a religious concept—we’re dealing with the self and with the brain so we need medical experts, and psychological experts, and if you have those two kinds of people in our worlds then we are going to be doing just fine.

In this paradigm, in this standard paradigm, the way most of us think, there is no room for SoulCare. It just is sort of a religious fringe activity. It’s a nice thing that churches are nice to each other and that people have small groups and they get some support and encouragement, but real problems, real problems with the self require psychotherapy and professional counseling; real problems with the brain require medication and if the brain problems dominate, then we need hospitalization and more intensive regimes of medication.

There’s a second paradigm that spins out of the first one, that is getting increasingly popular and I think it’s important that we face it head on and see it very clearly. The first paradigm that I call the standard paradigm that talks about the need for dealing with brain difficulties with medical treatment and self-difficulties with psychological treatment, the shift that’s happening in our culture in growing strength is another paradigm that I very simply label the biological paradigm.

As we begin the 21st century, Sigmund Freud has been largely discredited. The idea that we can move beneath the surface of people’s lives into their unconscious and we can treat these things called psychological disorders and we can figure all these things out—that idea has, in some circles, been discredited—and the idea is gaining prominence that what we need is not psychotherapy but psychopharmacology—not talking cures for a diseased self, but drug treatment for feelings that are painful for the self.

Biological treatment for people’s problems assumes that people are fundamentally physical beings. And it accepts the philosophy of naturalism, the philosophy of materialism that there is no supernatural reality, that there is no such thing as a soul, that all that we are is not even a self, let alone a soul, all that we are is a mass of chemicals, a mass of matter that somehow gets disordered and a pill can cure. A recent book came out called, *Shadow Syndromes*, and in this particular book called *Shadow Syndromes*, the authors, professional therapists, argue that if this assumption is true, that we are fundamentally material beings, not spiritual beings at all, then every disorder, not just Stella’s kind of disorder, where there are some brain implications, but also Doug’s struggle with self-hatred and feelings of failure, that all of these problems represent nothing more than physical anomalies. All of these problems represent nothing more than some kind of a medical struggle; the idea of soul is dismissed as religious myth. Stella, and Marie, and Doug all need appropriate medication as their primary and likely their exclusive treatment. Everything else is really unimportant.

Our day has been dubbed by some as the era of Cosmetic psychopharmacology—a term coined by a psychiatrist in 1990, as recently as 1990, in response to the advent of Prozac. The biological paradigm took serious root in 1955 when Carter products—have you heard that name Carter’s little liver pills?—when Carter products, a small drug company, developed the first tranquilizer called Miltown. When Miltown came out, it was the first major mood-altering drug. Are you anxious? Take a pill. Anxiety is not something which you cast your care upon God and trust the Spirit to bring a peace that Jesus promised to leave with us; that’s all sweet religious talk but the

real issues we need to deal with are the fact that we are biological people and a drug like Miltown is going to take care of our struggles—that’s when the biological paradigm began to take modern root. Maybe you recall the comedian Milton Burl. Miltown became so popular that Milton Burl began referring to himself as Miltown Burl.

There’s been a strong movement towards believing that, wouldn’t it be something if we could just find a pill for every struggle, a biological paradigm. *Time* magazine wrote an article called “Happiness by Prescription.” Think how often your attitude, my attitude has been, “If I have a headache, I take an aspirin; if I have a stronger headache, I take some migraine medication; if I have pain in some other part of my body, I take other kinds of pain medications; if I feel anxious, I take this; if I feel depressed, I take that; if I’m obsessive compulsive, I take this; if I have panic attacks, I take something else.” The whole idea is SoulCare has no place. How we relate really doesn’t matter; just support the drug companies to get the right drugs out and everything will be fine and church becomes this kind of a nice religious enterprise that really isn’t central to how we move at all.

The advent of Prozac has so strongly supported this whole direction. We’ve come to the point where *Newsweek* reported that depression and other mental disorders must be seen as treatable illnesses, never as failings of character. The issue has nothing to do with your soul; the issue has entirely to do with biological issues. The standard paradigm—get the professionals to go to work on psychotherapeutic issues or medical issues; the biological paradigm—find a pill that will take care of whatever is distressing you.

Folks, I believe that the revolution that I am envisioning of seeing Christians converse with each other with a passion of the Spirit and the wisdom of the Spirit from the Bible, I believe there are strong forces opposing this revolution. And I believe these forces can be summarized by talking about the paradigms that our culture has bought into. We really don’t need these kinds of conversations; they are incidental to the pills we need to take and the professional treatment we need to receive.

An interesting swing has been taking place in our culture recently; a third paradigm has come into the fore. A paradigm that can be called simply, the spiritual paradigm. Not the standard paradigm of professional treatment or the biological paradigm with a pill for every struggle, but now a spiritual paradigm. Like a tidal wave, in reaction perhaps to the biological way of thinking, people are starting to realize something that is true, that we’re more than physical beings.

There is something deeply soulful about us—we’re spiritual beings. There are legitimate longings; there are desires within us; we have souls that long for meaning that pills can’t satisfy. We have souls that long for love that psychotherapy doesn’t take care of; we’re souls, we’re beings who have desires that we simply cannot take lightly; they are there and they must be taken into account. But in this new spiritual paradigm as I observe it and as I read the books and talk to the people caught up in the new wave of spirituality, I discern this—most approaches falling under this third paradigm acknowledge the importance of spirituality in the reality of the soul, but they don’t take the Bible seriously as the final and sufficient authority to govern our understanding of people and problems. Spiritual formation, spiritual direction, character development, virtue, SoulCare—buzz words in our culture that don’t fit the biological paradigm, that don’t fit the

standard psychotherapeutic paradigm, but that fit in the spirituality paradigm—these words are getting very popular in our culture, but depending on whether they are built on biblical revelation they can have very different meanings.

I believe that our current fascination with spirituality really has more to do sometimes with coming up with some sort of a deep experience, and that becomes the goal; whether the experience is rooted in truth, doesn't matter quite as much. Is it possible that sometimes even in our churches, not in our dull churches, but in our exciting churches, where things are happening, that the excitement that we feel has less to do with being caught up in final truth and more to do with the well-orchestrated program that produces a sense of excitement that we react with, "That's the Spirit of Christ—something wonderful is happening. How do I know it? I feel something deep within me, I feel spiritually alive, I feel like I am living a life that's an adventure, I feel romantic, I feel important, I feel valuable, I feel loved, I feel caught up in worship, I feel all these things." Is it possible that a spiritual paradigm that we're living with today violates a biblical understanding?

If I start thinking with you about an understanding of people and problems that guides our view of SoulCare, I want you to know that I am operating not out of a standard paradigm that says people are brain and self problems or self and brain problems, or mostly self problems, I'm operating not out of a biological paradigm that says that all of our problems are rooted in physiology and ultimately pills are the answer, I'm operating out of a spiritual paradigm, but a spiritual paradigm, and let me use a big fancy word here, that has a revelational epistemology. All I mean by that is this: that as we move into people's lives, how we move, what we look for, how we understand people and problems, how we know what's going on, is rooted in what God has said in His word.

My task in this course is to begin with the Bible and move according to a spiritual paradigm, to understand the human soul and how it gets in trouble. When we understand that, then we will have a basis for how to move into people's lives in good SoulCare.

Discussion Questions

Why is it always appropriate to be concerned with spiritual issues, even if the person for whom you are providing SoulCare is clearly struggling with physical problems? Distinguish between an understanding of problems that focuses on treating a damaged self versus restoring an empty soul.

Why is a biblical basis for understanding people so crucial in developing a spiritual paradigm for SoulCare?

Lesson 3 Study Guide

CC202

SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

SoulCare is for Human Beings:
What it Means to Bear God's Image

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

When you complete this lesson you should understand why the beginning of wisdom in providing SoulCare depends on knowing what it means to believe that every person bears the image of God.

When you complete this lesson, “SoulCare is for Human Beings: What it Means to Bear God’s Image,” you should be able to:

- Understand that personal wholeness depends on relating well (to God and others), not on things going well.
- See hurting people as capable of living as whole people to the degree that they relate as Jesus relates.
- Recognize that the central ingredient in powerful conversation is love, not expertise.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Three: SoulCare is for Human Beings: What it Means to Bear God's Image

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

Understanding people and problems. Where do we start? I'm a mess. You're a mess. People struggle. Where do we start in thinking about another human being for whom we'd love to provide SoulCare? We'd love to have a rich, good conversation with them. But we know that more is involved than our own brokenness, more is involved than our own passions from the spirit, more is involved than loving the person meaningfully. We want to understand people. What's going on inside of the anorexic? What's going on inside of the multiple personality? What's going on inside of the thousands of folks across the world who just feel empty, who feel spiritually dry, who don't know how to get close to people? If we're going to provide SoulCare, we've got to understand something about the soul. Where do we start?

We start with what God has said. Lewis Barry Chafer, a noted theologian from years ago, said that the single most important revelation that God has given to us to help us understand people is this: Every person you meet, yourself included, we all bear the image of God. The question I want to ask in this particular presentation is what on earth does that mean? It sounds like academic theology. It sounds like something professors in seminary should be concerned with, and students in seminary should learn, and then when they leave seminary and get into the churches they forget, because it's irrelevant to peoples lives, but maybe it's not. Maybe if we're going to provide real SoulCare, maybe if I'm going to provide meaningful SoulCare for my wife, I'm going to be a good husband who's going to touch the soul of my wife, and touch the soul of my two sons that I love so much, and touch the soul of my friends and be touched by my friends; maybe if that's going to happen, we need to start with the very core central truth that everybody I talk to, myself included, bears the image of God. That leaves us, of course, with the obvious question, what does that mean?

To say that we bear the image of God means something very basic and very simple. We can start with the most basic understanding of what it means to bear the image of God by saying this: that in some way, your spouse, your best friend, your child, the guy you work with, the woman you had lunch with yesterday, every person, in some way, resembles God. To bear the image of something or someone means that we are like, we're similar to, we resemble the person whose image we bear.

To say that I bear the image of God means, whatever else it means, it means fundamentally this: that in some way I am like God. So the question is how. If I want to understand people and then realize how problems develop, I need to begin by saying, "Somehow I am like God but the likeness has been corrupted and in Christ the likeness can be restored." Maybe that's what SoulCare is all about. So how are we like God, and how has that likeness been corrupted? That's the question we're asking. How are spouses who are mad at each other like God? At that moment, how do they resemble God? How are women who starve themselves like God? How was Adolf Hitler like God?

How was Joseph Stalin like God? We say, “Mother Theresa, she was like God. Billy Graham, he’s like God.” But, what I’m telling you is that according to the Bible everybody bears the image of God, both Adolf Hitler and Mother Theresa, both Joseph Stalin and Billy Graham, we all bear the image of God, so the question is...what are we talking about? What does that mean to bear the image of God?

In order to understand what it means to bear the image of God and to realize that this is no dusty academic theological topic—this is vital, this is vital to the work of SoulCare—in order to understand what it means to bear the image of God, we have to start with one thing very, very basic. And the basic place to start is this: If we bear the image of God, the first thing to realize is this God whose image we bear is Himself a community of three persons. The Bible teaches that God exists as a trinity of three separate persons, each equally God, but distinguishable persons within a community, an eternal community. Obviously out of our league, we don’t understand it, but the Bible teaches it. We have to say then, that if we bear the image of God, we are somehow similar to God in terms of His being a trinity of persons who each finds their deepest joy in a certain kind of relating. The Trinity has gotten along very well for a very long time. They get along fabulously well, they have perfect community, perfect relationships, and we bear the image of a God who derives His joy—whose joy is dependent on, if I can put it that way—from relating a certain way to the other members of His community. God is a trinity composed of the Father, one person, the Son, another person, the Spirit, a third person. These three persons get along fantastically well and their joy depends on their relationships with each other.

Remember in the Gospels when we read that after thirty years of our Lord living on earth, living a perfect life, relating perfectly to His Father, relating perfectly to his mother and dad, relating perfectly to his siblings, in every way relating absolutely perfectly, that the Father could no longer stand Himself and He parted the clouds and when the Son was coming out of the baptismal water saying, “Father I am here to enable people to relate the way you and I relate; I’m here to take care of the fact that people’s patterns of relating are corrupt and they’ve messed up all the joy that we enjoy and we intend for them; I’m here to restore that to all of them, Father, all those who believe in Me.” And as He comes out of the waters of baptism saying that and declaring Himself ready to do His Father’s will, reveal the Father’s glory, the Father rips back the heavens and says, “I am crazy about you. I love you. When I look at you, I feel a joy that’s beyond description.” Why, Father and Son knew how to relate. Joy depends on relating in a particular way that the Trinity models for us perfectly.

Now, to bear the image of this remarkable community, this divine community, to realize that I bear the image of God, above all else, I believe means this: Like God, you and I are fundamentally, more than anything else, relational beings whose deepest joy depends on the quality of our relationships. You want joy? Sure you do. We’re built for it. Do I want joy? Of course I do. I was designed by God to enjoy joy. I was designed by God to feel profoundly glad that I’m alive. What is that deep sense of gladness, and that deep sense of wholeness? What does it depend on? It doesn’t depend on our talents. It doesn’t depend on our bank accounts. It doesn’t even depend on whether our kids turn out well. That has a bearing, obviously, but what it depends on fundamentally, is the kind of relationship I offer to another person and the kind of relationship that I receive from God. My deepest joy depends on the quality of my relationships—what I offer to you and what I receive and then respond to God. It doesn’t depend on all the things we think it

depends on. It depends on the quality of our relationships. That's what I believe it means to bear the image of God.

If we are image-bearers and we are designed to experience joy depending on the quality of our relationships, then it follows from that, that when God created us He created us with the capacities to enjoy relationships. He made us capable, as human beings, to enter in to the kind of relationship that the Father, Son, and Spirit have been enjoying from an eternity past. Dogs and cats form certain kinds of relationships as dog owners and cat owners would attest to, but they don't have the capacity to relate the way that the Trinity relates. Dogs can wag their tails when their master comes home, but they can't relate with the kind of soul to soul connection that you and I can relate with.

God has built human beings uniquely, distinct from all other creation, including angels, including animals. He has made us very, very distinct in that He has given us a particular ability, He has given us a particular capacity to enter into a certain kind of relationship; He has made it possible for us to relate well. He's made it possible for us to relate intimately first with God and then, secondly, with others.

Now, foundational to all that I'm going to say in this presentation, foundational to all my understanding of SoulCare, is this, and I want you to hear this point very, very centrally: You and I will experience ourselves as whole, solid, joyful people, to the degree we relate well with God and with others and only after we relate well with God and others will we relate well with ourselves.

I don't like self-hatred. Sometimes I feel really bad about myself. There are times I feel I don't know why my wife stays with me. There are times I feel apologetic to my kids for the kind of father they have. I don't enjoy self-hatred. I don't enjoy a sense of shame. There are times I feel profoundly guilty when I lose my temper. There are times when I worry how I am coming across. There are times I worry whether people who listen to me teach—how they are feeling about me. And there are times I worry about the impression that I make, and I have got all kinds of interior struggles, and I would love to be able to relate well to myself. I would love to be able to look in the mirror and feel delight and feel joy and feel like I am a whole person, I am solid person, I am a joyful person, I'm a worthwhile person, I'm a meaningful person. I'd love to feel all that, but listen, you're not going to relate well with yourself until first you relate well with God and you relate well with others. That's the summary of the whole law.

Jesus said, if you want to have life, then you've got to love God, love others, and then He in the Gospel has made it possible for us first to be loved by God, and then given the renewed capacities to love Him well and worship and love others well in service. That's why I believe it's a mistake—and that's why my approach to SoulCare does not include this mistake—a mistake of talking to people who are down on themselves, talking to people who are struggling in life and doing our best to improve their self-esteem, doing our best to solve their problems, doing our best to relieve their soul distress without focusing on restoring the image.

A person who doesn't like themselves, a person who's failing, a person who's down on who they are—rather than dealing with their soul distress and relieving their emotional pain, the focus of SoulCare is...I want to see the image of God restored, the capacities that this person has to

respond to God's love and to live out God's life by loving God and loving others. That's the focus. The relating well to yourself comes after. It isn't primary; it's not central.

Therefore, as I see it, SoulCare is primarily concerned with looking inside people's souls for what? SoulCare is primarily concerned with looking inside people's souls to see what's getting in the way of effectively relating in worship to God and in loving service to others. And as we see in SoulCare, what is getting in the way of effective relating? Then to ask the question: What do I have the spiritual power, by God's grace, to do to remove the obstacles or to help you move through the obstacles to be able to relate according to the image of God that defines who you are?

SoulCare is primarily concerned to release from people's souls the love that the Spirit of God has placed there. Now, hear that. SoulCare is primarily concerned to release from people's souls the love that God's Spirit has placed there. A love for God called worship, and a love for others called service, and as this happens, the soul becomes healthy.

Now, let's start taking this apart a little bit. I want you to picture yourself sitting across from somebody and suppose the person that you're sitting across from is a peer, a forty-year-old woman. You're a young, middle-aged woman, you have a good friend, and you're sharing intimately one evening about things and the friend shares with you that she is having really hard struggles with her teenage son. And you feel bad. You know what it's like to hurt over a child that's going in a bad direction. And you'd like to meet her at the level of souls. You'd like to have a soul connection. You'd like to provide SoulCare.

Well, maybe the first thing, if we've thought about the previous material I've covered in SoulCare, maybe the first thing is to pay attention to your own interior world. As your friend shares her struggle with her son, then you begin noticing, well, "What's happening inside of me as she says that? Yeah, I have a vision for this woman, what God can do in this woman's soul." And maybe that's the very first thing, but then I start looking at my own life, my own soul right at this moment and I say, "You know the passions that I'm feeling right now really emerge more from self-need than soul-thirst. What I'm experiencing right now is I'd love for this woman to handle her kid better, so her kid straightens out, so that I know that I'll be able to handle my kid well, so that my kid will never cause troubles." And you're thinking much more about your own life than the kingdom of God in this woman's life. And you become aware of that and you begin to say, "My goodness, I'm at it again. What kind of a wretch am I?" And the brokenness describes you in dependency before God, and you realize that the bad passions within you are endless and you realize that they're just running through you all over the place and the passion to control somebody else, to make your own life work better, are there. And you confess that to God, and you realize that apart from Christ you are totally unfit to offer SoulCare. That's brokenness, that's humility.

But then you go the next step. You don't sit there wallowing in what an awful person you are. You say, "By the grace of God that isn't who I most deeply am. By the grace of God there's something in me that's more than that. There's something in me that's deeper than that. You know, I really care about this lady. And I really care that the Spirit of God work in this woman's soul in the middle of this journeying reality of having a teenage son that's breaking her heart. There's a passion within me that, my gracious, it's holy. It's the passion of God. I want the spirit of God to

reveal Christ's glory in this woman's life. Maybe her son, as we pray about it, will respond to the revelation of God and become a godly kid. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Whatever happens, God will get the glory, and I'd love to have that effect on my friend as she shares about her teenage son."

Well, with good passion stirring in your soul, out of brokenness and dependence in coming to God, now you want to go beyond the issue of internal passions within you to wisdom from God that will guide your encounter with this woman. And so you say, "Well, what's wisdom? I want wisdom to know how to talk with this woman. Do I think about, 'Well here's what I did with my son when he came in late consistently: My husband and I grounded him and that seemed to work. Maybe had you grounded your son?'" And you come up with pieces of advice and you say, "I don't know, is that wise? Where does wisdom start?"

Folks, wisdom doesn't start with advice. Wisdom doesn't start with your experience—what worked and what didn't work—that's not where wisdom starts. Wisdom starts with theology. Wisdom starts with biblical revelation. Wisdom starts by looking at this woman and saying to yourself, very strongly and loudly, "This woman bears the image of God." And as you remind yourself of the fact that you're sitting next to an image-bearer, you're not sitting next to a mere mortal; you're not sitting next to just a person who happens to have a teenage kid that's causing her heartache; you're sitting next to somebody who resembles God and was created for the purpose of living out that resemblance. And as you think like that, it will change the tenor of your conversation, as you think like that, you're going to talk differently to her and you're going to remind yourself of a couple of things.

You're going to say, if this woman bears the image of God, that means that she has the capacity to relate like God. First to God, in response to the way He's related to her, and then secondarily to her son. So the issue is not, "how does she become a good mother who straightens out her son?" The issue is, "how does she relate like God to her son?" And the Spirit then does whatever He chooses with her son. Her responsibility, her opportunity, her joy is to live out her destiny, to live out the image of God by relating like God. That becomes your question.

And then you continue, as you think about the woman who bears the image of God, by saying, not only does she have the capacities to relate like God, but those capacities have been corrupted. Yes, man and woman bear the image of God, but man and woman together are fallen beings; we're image-bearers who are fallen and so our capacities have been corrupted. What's happening in this woman that's keeping her from relating well to her son? The issue is not to go find an expert in adolescent counseling and figure out the right strategy to cure her son with his adolescent rebellion. The issue is to think about what does it mean to have this woman begin to think about herself and to have me understand her as an image-bearer who has capacities to relate the way the Trinity's been relating? And then to ask: Why have those capacities been corrupted? And how, as a friend, can I move into her life to release what the Gospel has already done in her life, in restoring those corrupted capacities to new potential, so that she actually can become excited about revealing Christ?

That's how you start to think. What does it mean to bear the image of God? This strikes me as so foundational. I really want you to pay attention to this. I really want you to think about this notion of bearing the image of God. It's just so, so important. How we relate is everything. Let me give you a quick little sidebar on this, to help you understand why I think this topic is so crucial.

In the history of mental health treatment, back in the 1700s and 1800s, the idea spread that mental patients might actually be helped by being loved. It was a new thought in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe that mental patients were not just demonic, and were not just brain diseased, but they actually were people. They didn't talk about bearing the image of God; that's what they were tuning in to without using that language.

Maybe if they were loved, maybe if they were related to in a certain way, things could be different in their lives. And in the asylums, which up until that point had provided nothing more than custodial care, the doctors and the nurses actually began to talk with the patients. One particular doctor was totally innovative in that he invited patients to his home to eat with his family. And you know what they discovered? When people began to relate in a certain way to these very disordered mental patients in mental asylums back in the seventeenth and 1800s, that people began to change.

The advent of psychotherapy, one historian of psychiatry said, the advent of psychotherapy was the formal use of the doctor-patient relationship to restore health. That's how psychotherapy began. It wasn't a technical scientific enterprise. It was a relational enterprise; it was an enterprise that reflected the fact that the final reality is relationship and when people actually begin to relate, even in some way that's at all like the Trinity, powerful things start to happen; it's good stuff.

What is astonishing is that the idea of relational care so quickly disappeared from the scene. And the reason it disappeared from the scene, according to Edwin Shorter, in his book of history of psychiatry, is that it was later lost—the idea of relational care, if you will—it was lost completely and was lost completely not because it was ineffective, but it was lost completely, according to this historian, because there were not enough people available to provide the kind of necessary relationship.

What is the church? It's a community of relaters. The church is an army of people who go out and knock on doors and pass out leaflets. (Yeah, partly.) People who go out and man soup kitchens. (Wonderful to do that.) But centrally the church is a community of relaters who move toward a troubled humanity and say, "You bear the image. You long for a certain kind of relationship. Your joy depends on it. I'm going to relate to you in a particular way." SoulCare. Understanding the image of God—it's an important thought.

A second little sidebar that I want to point out to you is that SoulCare, as I've suggested, is not possible without an inside look. If we're going to provide SoulCare, I've got to go beneath the surface of your life. You must go beneath the surface of my life. And rather than—when you're talking to your woman friend whose son is causing troubles—you don't just give advice about "Well, ground him and take away his car and make sure your husband gets involved." There may be good wisdom in all of that, but you've got to look deeper and see what's really happening in the core.

Freud was the first secular professional, if you will, to say, yeah, that's right; you've got to dig deeper. You've got to do more than just give advice and give pills. You've got to dig deeper into

the deepest part of the soul and understand what's happening. What's very striking to me about Freud in his later years, he turned from doing much with individual patients to analyzing culture. You know why I believe he did that? Because he wasn't very successful with individual patients. It was easier to analyze culture from a distance than to work with people. He essentially gave up on the idea of SoulCare. Why? Because his interior look was not biblical. Listen to what he said toward the end of his life, in response to the fact that very few of his patients were getting better, as he continued to do a little bit of therapy in the latter part of his life. He said this, "I often console myself with the idea that even though we achieved so little therapeutically, at least we understand why more cannot be achieved. In this sense our therapy seems to me to be the only rational one." In other words, he's saying we've got to look deep into the human soul, but what I found, I can't change. Wouldn't it be something if the army of the church were not only to value a certain kind of relating, the way the Trinity relates, but also to understand a wisdom, which God reveals in His Word, that goes way beyond and contradicts Freud all over the place and gets down deep into the human soul and says, so this is what an image-bearer is like, way below the surface, so this is the truth of God, so this is wisdom that can guide me as I relate to other people?

With those two sidebars I hope you can hear a little bit of the basis for my excitement about this. I really do have a dream. And it's a dream that the church might actually become a community of relaters. We might come to understand that as we look into the human soul, we're looking into bearers of God's image whose joy depends on relating and that we have the capacities to relate in a particular way.

There are four basic capacities. Let me state them as we end this presentation and begin talking about them in the next. There are four basic capacities in my soul and in yours that define me as a bearer of God's image who is capable of relationship.

Number 1: the capacity to desire. I'm fundamentally a passionate being—I desire; I want; I long. The capacity to desire, number 1.

Second, the capacity to perceive. I can look at my life. I can look at my history. A young woman can look at her history of sexual abuse and perceive what's happened to her and come to certain conclusions about how life works. We all perceive our world and draw conclusions and live according to our understanding of things. We have the capacity to perceive.

Thirdly, we have the capacity to choose. When your teenage son is driving you crazy, you can make a choice. You can set a goal and you can say it's to straighten him out. That's a choice that you can set as a volitional being capable of choice. And with your capacity for choosing "My goal is to straighten him out I've chosen that, and now I will choose my strategy as to how I'm going to straighten him out." You have the capacity to choose.

Capacity to desire, to perceive, to choose and lastly, you and I have the capacity to feel. To responsively feel; to experience emotions as we move through our worlds.

Four capacities that define who we are as bearers of God's image; if we're going to understand people and the problems that we have, we need to understand we bear God's image and that means we can relate and we have the capacities to do that—to desire; to perceive; to choose; and to feel. We'll look at the capacity to desire in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

How will seeing people as bearers of God's image affect the way you relate? Billy Graham and Adolph Hitler both bear the image of God. What does that mean, given that Graham became a good man and Hitler was manifestly evil?

Discuss the following statement: Wisdom for relating does not consist of coming up with good advice. It, rather, begins with good theology.

Lesson 4 Study Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

Designed to Relate 1:
The Capacity to Desire

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

When you complete this lesson you should understand that to be an image-bearer means (in part) that we are “creatures of desire,” that people always move toward whatever they believe will satisfy their desires.

When you complete this lesson, “Designed to Relate 1: The Capacity to Desire,” you should be able to:

- Recognize the importance of providing a safe relationship (free of judgment) that allows others to discover their core desire for God.
- Think about three levels of desire—desires of *convenience*, of *importance*, and of *necessity*—as you engage in SoulCare.
- Realize that people aim too low when they prioritize the satisfaction of desires of *convenience* or *importance*.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Four: Designed to Relate 1: The Capacity to Desire

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

If we are going to practice SoulCare, we are going to need to understand people and their problems. The beginning point of understanding people is to recognize that you and I bear the image of God. The question is...what does that mean? In our last presentation, I suggested that we bear the image of a relational God whose joy is present because of the way the members of the Trinity relate. You and I have been created by God with the capacities to relate in a way that brings us joy. What are those capacities?

We talked about four capacities that, in my understanding of things, define what it means to bear the image of God. That first capacity, which we are going to look at in this presentation, is the capacity to desire. Think with me about that. In a book called *Christian Spirituality*, George Lane says this: “We have to recognize a certain basic yearning for self-surrender that is present in every individual person.” Now, hear that again, “We have to recognize a certain basic yearning”—desire, passion. We have to recognize that there’s a passion in people and the passion that George Lane identifies is a yearning passion that’s basic for self-surrender that is present in every individual person.

Jonathan Edwards makes a point that’s related in his book *Religious Affections*, when he says that none of us ever moves towards anything that we don’t desire. If I am here and I go there, the only way to understand why I went from here to there is because I desired to go there. So desire is fundamental to who we are and why we move in certain directions, where we aim.

Take these two points together—that we had a yearning for self-surrender present in everybody and take Edwards’ point that we only move toward what we desire—put them together and I think we can say it this way: Every image-bearer desires something bigger than themselves to give themselves to. You and I desire to give ourselves to something that’s bigger than ourselves. The Bible refers to this deep passion in the human heart, this core longing within each of us, what it says when God says in Ecclesiastics Chapter 3:11 that God has set eternity in the heart of all men, all women. Every image-bearer has eternity—transcendence, something larger, something larger that’s happening, a larger story, a larger narrative that God is telling that I desire to be swept up into, something that provides me with a meaningfulness, with a relationship with somebody who’s huge and I desire these things. I am passionately committed to these things. In the core of my soul, there’s desire.

Jesus put it this way: In Mathew 6:21, He said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Put that a little bit differently without changing the meaning: What it is that you treasure, what you most passionately desire, where you see the most value—that’s where your heart is going to be. We’re people with the capacity to desire. Jesus was telling us that we direct our lives

according to what we're most aware that we most want. My life is ruled by the passions that I am aware of that are operating within my soul. I have a warning of—Jesus has intended to say to us—you're in danger of valuing the wrong thing. And with your desires that are bursting within you, you decide what you most want is that, and you move towards that...you're going to mess up your life. You are not going to be whole. You are going to miss out on joy. You are going to miss out on being the solid person God has called you to be.

Paul had the very same thing in mind when in Colossians 3:1 he told us to set our hearts—on what?—all things above. You're passionate people. Attach your passion to right things. Discover that your deepest passion really is for the right thing.

I see from all of this introductory thinking, two lessons emerge. Lesson number 1: You and I will move in directions that we believe, that we perceive, that we understand will take us toward the fulfillment of desire. We will move in directions that we believe will take us towards the fulfillment of desire; don't apologize for that. That's who we are, that's who I am, and I do what I believe will reach the deepest levels of desire.

I had a wonderful dinner last night, and I wanted dessert. When the dessert tray was brought, there was something within me that saw the seven-layer chocolate cake that looked delicious, and I thought, "I desire that." I didn't have it. Why? Because I resisted my desire? No. I became aware of a deeper desire; I didn't want to feel the way I know I feel when I indulge in that sort of decadence. I didn't want to feel certain results. I also wanted to feel the joy of stepping on my scale this morning and not seeing the extra pounds that eating that cake would produce. In other words, I moved toward a deeper desire than what was initially apparent to me. All of us move toward what we desire the most.

The second lesson that emerges from my introductory comments is this: It's possible and it's common to aim our desire too low. Put another way, it's possible to be unaware of what we most desire. It's possible to look into our souls and to say that what I really want is not the health that will come long-term from resisting the cake. What I really want is the pleasure of the cake right now. I take desires that are very real but they are secondary and I don't become aware of deeper desires, so I am controlled by whatever desire I am most aware of. It's possible to aim our desires too low and to become aware only of lesser desires and, therefore, to orient our lives around things that really don't satisfy our deepest desire.

When we move in directions that we believe will take us toward fulfillment, but if our perception is wrong, we are not moving toward fulfillment, we are moving toward secondary satisfaction that robs us of the joy that could be ours.

Now, think about this more carefully. Consider a single woman, who lives alone and who wishes she were married and had a family. She doesn't feel her singleness is a calling; she feels it's a burden, maybe a curse. And you are working with this woman. She is a friend of yours. You want to involve yourself in SoulCare and she is kind of discouraged and talks about her loneliness a lot and she feels like life has treated her unfairly. When people say life treats us unfairly, the word *life* is a metaphor for the word *God*.

She's had a bout with cancer, let's assume. I am thinking of a particular person, and this cancer was dealt with two years ago. Successful. She's now in remission. And let's just assume a particular moment of her journey comes into focus here—that she is getting ready to leave her apartment, where she lives by herself, for a medical check-up with her oncologist. After two years post the cancer surgery, and let's assume something else, let's assume that she misplaced her car keys. She's due at the doctor's office at two o'clock. It's one o'clock. It's about an hour drive. She is ready to leave and she cannot find her car keys. Now, in the middle of this particular point of her journey, as we look into her soul and we say, "This woman, she's single, she's lonely, she's going for a check-up hopeful to get good news from her oncologist. She has to leave right away. She can't find her car keys. This woman bears the image of God." What does that mean?

Well, let's start with...she has the capacity for desire. Now, let's think about that. What does she desire at that moment? There are three levels of desire.

This woman bears the image of God. That means she has the capacity to desire. Now there are three levels of desire that we can discern from this little scenario that I have created. Let me list these levels of desire for you.

The first level we can call, very simply, "desires of convenience." Now, that's a real desire. That's a desire that should not be taken lightly. It should not be demeaned or dismissed. She desires that certain things go well in her life at the level of convenience. Call these casual longings—desires of conveniences, casual longings. What would they be in her case? Well, she wants things to happen in her immediate world, right now, that will make her life, for that moment, more pleasant, and a little more comfortable. An obvious desire of convenience is that she wants to find the car keys. She might pray about it. You've all been there—you have lost your car keys or something has gone wrong that's small and you're going to the mall. You can't find a spot. You're in a rush and you want to have a parking spot. "God give me a parking spot. God help me find my car keys." Sometimes it happens. Sometimes it doesn't. It's a desire and she does things to honor her desire. She begins looking around for the car keys, she prays, she does whatever she can do.

The strength of that desire to find her car keys is really more intense than merely the discovery of something that she needs for a matter of convenience. The strength of her desire is more intense. The strength of her desire to find the car keys is more intense than if she were planning to get into the car to go buy a gallon of milk. If she's looking to find her car keys, she can get in her car to go to her oncologist to discover whether she is healthy or perhaps the cancer has returned. So there's another level of desire. She badly wants to find the keys, because her desire of convenience—her desires for convenience—is related to and will contribute to the satisfaction of a second level of desire that we call, again very simply, desires of importance. It's not just conveniences now. There is something here that anybody would agree is very, very important to her. She longs for something that matters. Call these not casual longings, not desires of convenience, but call these critical longings—"desires of importance." She wants good health to be able to continue to enjoy whatever life provides. That's far more important than her desire to find her car keys. It's not a casual desire. It's not a desire of convenience. It's a very deep desire and that important desire for health is also related to other things. It has implications. It has permutations.

The important desire for health relates to what she might regard, and I would suppose she would regard, as the far more passionate desire: I want to stay alive. I want to be healthy, not just so I don't hurt, not just so I continue to play golf or continue to go out for lunch with friends, but I still have a dream. I still have a desire, a deeper desire, to be loved by a man, to bear children, to be a mom; I have a desire of importance that matters to me deeply. The desire for health might be more on her mind that morning, but the strength of her desire for health is related to an even deeper desire of far more importance: a desire to be involved in the kind of relationship that she longs to be involved with, a critical desire.

I now want you to think a little bit more deeply with me. Why does this woman want health, and why does this woman want the health that would permit the possibility of relationships? Why does she want a relationship with a man? Why does she want to be married? Why does she want to enjoy that kind of intimacy? What are the desires all about? You know from your own experience looking to your own soul that there is something inside of you and inside of me, and this is part of what it means to bear the image of God, that longs for a core fullness, that longs for a core wholeness, a core solidness, a core satisfaction, something that says I am at rest, I know who I am, I am at peace with myself, and with life. I am alive and something in me is deeply alive in a way that brings me very deep joy. Now that's a very core passion within this woman's soul.

Her passion—can I suggest?—therefore, is not really not for her car keys, although there is a passion for that, a desire of conveniences. Her passion is not really for good health although, of course, that's a passion. I struggled with cancer several years ago, and trust me, I understand the image I'm using, the illustration I am using. I'll be seeing my oncologist shortly and I am looking forward to good news that I continue to be healthy. I have a passion for that, but that's not central. That's an important passion of mine, an important desire, but it's not central. There's something that she wants even more than a relationship with a man. There is something she wants even more than to bear children as a married woman and to have a happy family. What her real, deepest passion is for can be expressed very simply: She wants soul satisfaction. She wants something to fill an empty spot in the core of her being. Her belief is that finding the car keys, getting to the doctor, getting a good report, remaining healthy, finding a man, putting on a white dress, getting married, bearing children, having a nice house, two cars and a happy family—that that would fill the core of her being. Because all she is aware of, and frankly, all most of us are aware of, are what I am calling desires of importance. We believe that these things will touch the deepest part of our souls and give us the satisfaction that we want.

But suppose we are wrong. Suppose this woman is wrong. Think how she feels, as she is in her apartment scrambling about, hoping to find the car keys. "God, let me find the car keys. I've got enough going wrong in my life. I've got to go to my oncologist. I had cancer a couple of years ago. I am lonely. I am single. I am miserable. Can't you at least let me have my car keys? Give me some satisfaction of my desires of conveniences. And then, God, please, in addition to my car keys let me get a good report, and, God, let me go deeper. I would really like to stay healthy and find a husband. I would like to have the joy of being a mother. God that's what I really, really want."

Suppose she is wrong. Suppose she's wrong, not because she wants these things, but because she is not aware that she wants something else more. Suppose she is wrong in assuming that all these legitimate wants all the way from finding car keys, to having a happy family, that all these legitimate wants really don't get to the core of her desire.

Suppose there is a third level. The third level we might call desires of necessity. Desires of necessity, call these consuming longings. Not just critical—yes, it’s very important that I stay healthy. (Yes, that matters.) And of course I would like to be happily married, and have children. (If that’s your desire, nobody would be critical of you for that.) Is it necessary? Is she saying that as long as I live in my apartment alone and don’t have certain things, that my soul can’t be full? I bear the image of God and so I have deep, deep desires but these deep desires could only be satisfied by a, b, c, d—these are necessary.

Suppose she is wrong. Suppose what needs to happen in a SoulCare relationship is to interact with this woman in such a way that she becomes aware of a far deeper dimension to her soul than desires of convenience and desires of importance, and suppose she becomes aware of consuming longings. I call them that because when you become aware of these desires, then their satisfaction supercedes the satisfaction of every other desire.

Talk to the father whose kid has just been put in jail. I talked to one recently. His heart is broken if all he is aware of is his desire for his son to be responsible and lead a godly Christian life and a life free of crime and a life free of the whole jail system. If all he is aware of is having a wonderful son that he can enjoy playing golf and praying with, and all these legitimate things, if all he is aware of is them, this man is absolutely in despair. But suppose, suppose because of a SoulCare relationship, he feels the safety in the movement of the Spirit. That enables him to become aware of something far deeper.

Our consuming longing, I suggest, centers on the experience of soul life. We want to know we’re alive. We want to know that our lives have meaning and value. We want to know that we matter. We want to know that we are loved. We want to know that we are able to deeply enjoy both the receiving and giving of love. We want to experience, we long to experience, it is necessary that we experience soul life. If we don’t experience the core of life in our souls, then we are going to experience soul death. And that is unbearable. That is something we can’t handle in its ultimate form. Soul death is eternity without God. It’s eternity in hell forever, soul death.

You long for soul life. The kind of life that I am referring to, what I am calling soul life, as I understand the Scriptures has two key elements. Number 1: Soul life depends on objective meaning. We must experience the participation in a purpose that we did not invent. We must be involved in a purpose and a design of movement towards something that is important beyond ourselves. There must be objective meaning in our lives that we are participating in the larger story of God.

And secondly there must be what I choose to call ecstatic union. Do you ever get bored with Christianity? Church becomes boring? Maybe you’re not going to a dry and dusty church. Maybe you are going to a very alive church, but somehow, a deep part of your soul is not touched. There is a superficial ecstatic union. There is noise and all sorts of excitements, but is there a deep sense of “I am in the presence of the eternal God in a way where we are connected”? There is an ecstatic union. There is an ecstasy. There is explosion in my soul that says, “God and I, we’re tight. I am encountering God. I know God. I am with God.”

Chances are high that the single woman we have been talking about has no conscious awareness of her consuming longings, as she is looking for her keys. Chances are high that she’s most aware

of her casual longings at that point. Once she finds her keys, then she's going to, with a moment's reflection, become aware of a different level of longing. She's going to become aware of her critical longings for health, and for a decent income, and enough money to buy a home as opposed to the apartment that she lives in, and the desire for family and all the pleasures that she believes these things could bring.

I want you to hear two very big points as we conclude our comments about this notion of desire. First, as long as this woman remains unaware of her deepest desires of necessity, as long as she remains unaware of her passion for soul life in objective meaning and ecstatic union, then her consuming longings for what only relationship with God can provide will not drive her.

As long as she remains unaware of her deepest desires of necessity, the result is that her lesser desires will become demands. She will be thoroughly self-oriented. She'll be focused not on God and others. She'll be focused on finding herself, and Jesus made a promise to us: If you look for yourself, you're going to lose yourself. As long as she is not aware of her deepest desires of necessity, the result is going to be that her lesser desires, whether it's car keys or a husband and kids, will become profound demands. Why?

Because at that moment she is depending on finding satisfaction in these lesser things that will satisfy the deepest desires in her soul. She is treating desires of convenience and desires of importance as though they were desires of necessity—but they're not. She's deceived. She's wrong. She isn't aware of what is most profound within her own soul. She won't believe that. Until she is meaningfully in touch with her real desires of importance, she won't believe that these desires of importance are not necessary. She'll assume that what she thinks is important are essential to her soul life, but they're not. She's wrong. Her passion for casual longings and her passion for critical longings—her desires of convenience and her desires of importance—will be seen as necessities, and they will be passionately consuming and will rule her life, and that's a tragedy.

The second point that I want you to hear, is that the work of helping this woman—and you and I helping each other—discover the deepest longings in the soul is part of the work of SoulCare. SoulCare doesn't try to calm her down with soothing words. SoulCare doesn't only help her find her keys. (Sure that's a practical thing to do. Help her look for them.) SoulCare does not focus, though, on helping her find her keys. SoulCare doesn't focus on helping her get the best oncologist. Those are good things to do, but SoulCare focuses on a vision. A vision of becoming aware of what this woman's soul was designed for and what she, therefore, most profoundly desires. What is necessary for this woman in order for her to become whole and joyful and live what the Bible calls a victorious Christian life, which doesn't mean a trouble-free life, but it means a life of meaning and purpose and joy. The work of SoulCare is helping her get in touch with what her deepest desires really are.

Providers of SoulCare need to understand the first capacity of the image-bearing soul: the capacity to desire. That's not all there is to it, but you need to understand that each of us desires and until we're aware of our deepest desires, we're slaves to our lesser desires.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean for creatures of desire to “aim too low”?

Why is “aiming too low” an act of idolatry?

Soul life depends on objective meaning in God’s story and ecstatic union with God’s Person. Only people who “aim high” are in line to experience both. Explain and discuss.

Lesson 5 Study Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

Designed to Relate 2:
The Capacity to Perceive

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb discusses how perception drives emotions and choices, and why false beliefs are such a serious problem.

When you complete this lesson, “Designed to Relate 2: The Capacity to Perceive,” you should be able to:

- Understand what it takes to deeply change, to shift from *self-dependence* to *God-dependence* as you encounter life.
- Understand how perception drives emotions and choices.
- See that traumatic experiences (such as sexual abuse) not only cause terrible pain, but they also shape false beliefs.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Five: Designed to Relate 2: The Capacity to Perceive

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

Women who control their husbands are transformed into relational beings—how? The husbands who back away from their wives, who don't want to handle conflict, who keep their distance, are transformed into what God has called them to be—how? Friends who don't know how to draw close to each other, whose conversations remain shallow and superficial, are transformed, radically changed into beings who relate and to people who relate the way that members of the Trinity relate—how? What does the Bible teach? We're transformed according to God's intentions for how He wants to transform us into relational beings—how? By the renewing of our minds.

We are going to talk now about our capacity to think. Our capacity to perceive, the fact that we have minds, that we are people who look at data and draw conclusions and somehow, if we're going to change, it's going to depend on changing our minds, on renewing our minds. And if we are going to be effective at SoulCare, if we're going to relate to each other in a meaningful way, and enter the battle for each other's souls, and move into the depths of who people are, and release the power that's within us into somebody else's life, the effect is going to be a change in the way we think, and that's going to transform us. That's our topic in this presentation. The capacity to perceive—pivotal, central. We have to understand it if we are going to understand people and problems.

Years ago when I was in private practice as a psychologist, I can recall once stepping out into the waiting room between appointments and I was greeted by my secretary, who looked up at me, and she said something disturbing. She said, "Larry I just called your home to speak to your wife and a man's voice answered, and I asked to speak to Rachael, and the man's voice replied, 'She's not home right now. This is the telephone man.'" And she said, "What do you suppose is happening? Did you call the phone company?" And I said, "Well, no, I don't have any reason to call the phone company. Our phone had no problems and so I don't know who's in our home; there certainly should be no phone man in our home."

So I called the house. The line was busy. Somebody's talking on our phone. And as I relayed to my secretary, "The line's busy now," she looked up at me and very calmly, not particularly warmly, but very calmly, said, "How does it feel to know that right now, even as we speak, your house is being robbed?" And I thought, "Now wait a minute, crooks don't answer phones while they're on the job. This makes no sense to me at all, but it alarmed me enough to think that I need to check; somebody is in my house and nobody's home." My wife was away on a five-day trip. My sons were both at school. My house was empty and my line was busy. And I got alarmed.

So I called the police. And when you call the police with a situation like this, how do you handle it? Well I recall I dialed the phone number and the gruff voice of a desk sergeant responded,

“Sergeant Barker here, how can I help you?”

And I said, “Well my name is Larry Crab, I am a tax-paying citizen, and my concern is that there is nobody in my house but somebody’s talking on my phone.”

“What do you mean somebody’s...[grumbling]”

And I said, “Well that’s what’s happening, and I would very much like it if you could meet me at my house to check my home. I don’t want to go into my house without some police officers with me. And I would appreciate it if the police man you dispatch to my home would get there first.”

So, I waited a few minutes. He agreed to send some police officers to my home. I drove home, about a fifteen-minute drive from my office. And by the time I got there, there were two police cars parked in the driveway of my house, and I went to the front door—it was locked. But the policemen were already inside. They had let themselves in through the back door, which was unlocked. I unlocked the front door, walked in, the policeman greeted me (the senior officer) and he had a clipboard. And on the clipboard I saw a piece of paper that said “burglary report.” And he said to me, “You’re the owner here?”

I said, “Yes.”

“Name?”

“Larry Crabb.”

“Address?” And he said, “I hate to tell you this, Mr. Crabb, but there have been a rash of burglaries in this neighborhood, and your house has obviously been the last one to be hit. Because we’ve been here now for just a few minutes, we’ve gone through your entire house rather quickly, and your house is a train wreck. Every room is totally disheveled and everything is out of place. The crooks were looking for who knows what. Maybe you’ve got jewelry or paintings or things that were hidden, cash stashed behind something, behind a closet. But they’ve gone through the entire house and just wrecked your house. I’m sorry about that, but you’ll need to go through the entire house and come back and tell us what’s missing and we’ll make the report.”

And I said, “Okay, I will do that.”

So, I walked through the house and went through each room in the home we were living in, in south Florida at the time, and I came back to the policeman, and I said, “Excuse me officer. I don’t really know how to tell you this, but this is the way I left it. The house is the way I left it. Nothing’s out of place. Everything’s the way I choose to live when my wife isn’t here.” She’d been gone for a week.

Now, think about that story, and think about the policeman. Here is a man who had the capacity to perceive. What did he do with that capacity? He looked at data. He concluded, based on the data, something that was wrong. He came to a wrong conclusion based on the data that he evaluated with his capacity to perceive. I suppose his position was...nobody in their right mind

would choose to live like this if they had an option, so it had to be a crook; it couldn't be a choice to live like this, and he didn't know how I choose to live. But he came to a conclusion, and the conclusion was based on his perception of the data.

Now, his perception was wrong. Both his behavior and his emotions grew out of his perception. He looked at the data. He drew a conclusion, and as a result of drawing a conclusion that my house was the last in a rash of burglaries, he found himself getting angry. More crooks, and the courts are going to throw it out, and these crooks are going to get away with it, and I'm mad about the whole thing. He was feeling something based on what? Reality? No. He was feeling something based on a perception of reality that happened to be wrong. And he was behaving in certain ways. He was filling out a burglary report form, but there had been no burglary. Why was he filling it out? Because of a perception.

If you want to change the way he feels, and you want to change what he does, then what has to be changed? He can be transformed by renewing his mind. The change that needs to be—to return him to certain kind of an emotional life, and a certain kind of behavior life—depends on a change in his perceptions.

One psychologist expressed that thought very simply, by talking about the ABC theory. He said that you might want to let A stand for activating circumstances. Here are the things that happen: Your wife gets mad at you. Your best friend betrays you. Your boss tells you the economy is so bad that you're losing your job.

Something happens, and then with your capacity to perceive, you look at the data of life. Just like the policeman looked at the data of my messy house, you look at the data of life and you draw certain conclusions because you're capable of evaluating your world and drawing conclusions on the basis of your evaluation. And when you have a belief based on what you see, the belief then determines how you feel and what you do.

A—activating circumstance

B—belief

C—consequence, both emotionally and behaviorally. The ABC theory of emotion.

Paul told us in the Bible—the verse that I've been quoting in Romans 12, verses one and two—that real change depends on something happening in our minds. Paul is making the assumption that, as men and women who bear the image of God, we have a rational capacity. We are capable of perceiving our world and drawing conclusions. I want you to think about this capacity to perceive because it is crucial to effective SoulCare. As I am talking to a friend who's struggling with life, he's perceiving the meaning of what he's experiencing, drawing conclusions, coming up with beliefs, and as a result, he's going to respond and move in certain directions based on his conclusions. Suppose his conclusions are wrong. Do I understand people and problems? To do so I've got to understand the capacity to perceive.

Think of it this way: Consider what happens when a little girl is sexually abused. I want you to consider what happens when a little girl is sexually abused. We'll agree at the outset that's a horrible experience, should never happen. It has repercussions. The girl is the victim. It's not

her fault; it's the fault of the bad person that did these things to her, this perpetrator of an evil crime against this innocent little girl. Of course that's all true. It's a bad thing. But I want you to consider what happens in this little girl's interior world. If we're going to provide effective SoulCare, we need to enter the soul and have some feel for what's going on. Now what is the capacity to perceive and how is it functioning inside of this little girl when she is sexually abused? I want you to think about that with me.

Begin with the obvious assumption that we're making clearly—that this little girl is a soul. I don't like the phrase "she has a soul." This little girl is a soul. She's a personal being. She's somebody who desires. She has a capacity to want what God intended for her to enjoy. She longs to be celebrated by her mommy and daddy. She longs to be safe in the arms of a strong person who has the power to protect her. She longs to give all that is within her that's beautiful to another to be enjoyed. All that's there. She has the capacity to desire. She's a personal being who longs for things, and she was created with that capacity by a loving God who has created her in His good community image. And then, as this little girl, with this capacity to desire, this little girl whose joy depends on a certain quality of relationship being experienced, then something horrible like this happens. Some person uses her in a way God never would. In a way a godly person never would. Somebody uses her with no thought of her deep value as a person. With no thought of the fact that she is a special being who bears the image of God, with no regard for her capacity to enjoy true love. She becomes merely an object to be enjoyed in perverse ways by somebody who wants to use her. That's what happens in sexual abuse. There is no way to dress it up, make it less vile than what it is.

But here's what I want you to understand. When this little girl is abused, her mind goes to work. She's not simply experiencing pain. She's perceiving the data of her world and she's going to come up with certain positions, certain beliefs, certain assumptions that are going to guide her life. How does that work? She experiences the data of this emotional trauma. She experiences the experience of being violated and, without having to be taught, she knows that something inside of her feels awful. Something inside of her is violated. She knows that there's a design that is being violated, that's being missed, and something's going on. Her abuser, as so often happens, let's assume her abuser is somebody that she has trusted, who has built up her confidence in him and he was able to use a relationship as an opportunity to move toward her in this very, very bad way.

Now as she reasons and reflects on the experience, not that she sits back as a five-year old girl and gets out her notepad and thinks through her rational processes; she doesn't do that. But these things are happening in her because she has the capacity to perceive. God has given her the capacity to think, and what He wants this little girl to do is to say, "No matter what happens in my life, God is good, God is faithful and worthy of trust." Is that the way she thinks, in the middle of her abuse? The answer is, if it were to happen it would be a miracle. But maybe that's the miracle that SoulCare can produce. That God is faithful at the moment of the abuse. Was God faithful during the Holocaust? What does that mean? What is she perceiving about God in the middle of this data? What is she concluding about life and how she should live her life?

Well, her mind is going to work and she is forming a belief, really a series of beliefs. And as you think about it, maybe you can come up with another list of beliefs, but I would think—just sitting back loosely and not trying to be terribly careful in my thought here—that this little four-, five-,

six-year-old girl in the middle of abuse would draw certain conclusions. She would start believing certain things with her capacity to perceive and she would probably start by saying something like: “The world’s a dangerous place. Bad things happen here.”

I’m not sure if my beautiful little granddaughter, who’s just a little past three—I don’t know if she knows the world’s a dangerous place. Her world is a pretty safe place right now. No man has touched her wrongly, and I hope no man ever does. Her Pop-Pop (that’s me) holds her and takes her out for breakfast and plays with her and reads her books and I’m not a dangerous person for her. Her Nana (my wife) is a wonderful grandmother. She’s not a dangerous person for this little girl. Her mom and dad are terrific parents. This little girl lives in a safe world, but the time is going to come—hopefully not through abuse, but in some form in all of our lives the time comes—when something happens that makes us say: “I’m not safe in this world. This world’s a dangerous place.” A belief that we all come to with our capacity to perceive.

Secondly, she would have to say something like this (I couldn’t imagine her not secondly drawing this conclusion): that no one can be counted on to protect me as I legitimately want to be protected. Now again, realize why we are talking about this. This is a friend of yours who is now thirty-five years old, who this happened to when she was five. And this is a friend of yours who’s struggling with her relationships with guys or with her roommate girlfriends or with people at work, and she’s not close in a relationship, and she’s feeling anxiety and depression.

She’s talking to you, and she’s not close to God, and you’re wanting to enter the battle for her soul. And you begin to think about this thirty-five-year-old woman you’re talking to—she was once a five-year-old girl with the capacity to perceive—and perhaps you get to know her pretty well and you hear about her abuse and you begin to realize that in the interior world of her life, beneath the surface of her struggles with her colleagues and her job frustrations, beneath that, that she believes that this world’s a dangerous place.

You’re saying, “Well, I agree with that.” She’s also concluding that there’s nobody that I can count on to protect me as I want to be protected. And you struggle with that, but you say, “Well, I..you know, I think that too. I know God is my Protection. God is my Refuge. God is my Rock. God is my Anchor. God is my Defender, but He doesn’t always do it the way I wish He would. He doesn’t protect me from certain things that I legitimately wished I never had to experience.” So conclusion number two: “no one can be counted on to protect me” is in this little girl’s soul with her capacity to perceive.

Thirdly, I would suggest that she probably draws this conclusion: I must, therefore (the world’s a dangerous place; I can count on no one to protect me from its danger), I must, therefore, look out for myself. Well, I believe that the reality of living in this world leads us all to a number of conclusions, but one of the primary ones that we all grow up believing at some point is that trust is suicide. To put your trust in anybody results in destruction, because nobody is worthy of trust.

We look at God and we say, “You didn’t protect me from the abuse.” We look at our fathers and we say, “You weren’t there when the abuse took place.” We look at our mothers and we say, “You weren’t there when certain things took place and when I hurt in certain ways, you didn’t move toward me properly. I can’t trust anybody. Yes, I’ll receive what I can from people, but

fundamentally nobody is there in this dangerous world. I must depend on my resources to make my world work. Trust is dangerous. I must never let myself go in glad response to another. I must never, with spontaneity and fullness of my feminine soul or my masculine soul, boys and girls the same, I must never just give who I am to another; it's too much of a risk. I better play it safe. I must always be on guard."

The last thing I would suggest she learns, and there are twenty more things that you can think of, but the last thing I want to suggest with her capacity to perceive—she is saying to herself, "You know, when I've enjoyed the dangers the greatest—here's a man who looked at me with desire and I found myself vulnerable, enjoying the fact that he enjoyed me, and I made myself vulnerable to him and then he came and he enjoyed me in a perverse way that didn't feel right. So when I see that somebody wants to move toward me and love me and hold me and snuggle with me and emotionally move toward me, something in me gets on guard. When I'm enjoyed, I hurt. The danger is very present. So what is enjoyable about me must be hidden. I must see to it that nobody has a reason to enjoy me."

Why is it that I have met a number of women who, by the way they dress and the way they comport themselves, seem to be insisting on the message: "There is nothing about me as a woman that is worth enjoying. I will not give you my warmth. I will not give you my tenderness. I will not give you my beauty. It's too risky. I've been hurt."

But more happens than just learning a series of beliefs. Certainly that happens, and that's huge. But this little girl's capacity to perceive, when the abuse takes place, she learns a variety of beliefs that become very real to her. But more than learning belief, she forms some images of herself, some images of other people and an image of God.

Now I want you to consider a fact that almost every therapist has seen: Abused children typically blame themselves for the abuse. Now, in 99.9 percent of the cases, nothing could be further from the truth. My wife is a victim of sexual abuse (I say that with permission); did she invite it? Is it her fault? No. She was a victim. Why then, do victims of sexual abuse not blame the perpetrator, but why do they blame themselves? That's typical. The fault clearly lies with the abuser, but they blame themselves, and develop an image of themselves as bad, somehow dirty or cheap or maybe seductive, or something is wrong with me that precipitated this horrible experience; somehow it's my fault and I deserve it. Is that conviction of sin? No, it's Satan's counterfeit of conviction of sin. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Assume that every child, from conception on, from the day the child is conceived in Mummy's tummy, through the day that the child emerges into this world as a fully functioning human being as a little one-day old baby; little girl, little boy—assume that every child from the beginning sees God as less than fully good. That's part of what the doctrine of depravity implies. None of us comes into this world saying, "God, You are absolutely worthy of trust; You are totally good." Our legacy from Adam and Eve is to look at God and say, "I'm not sure about You. I think I'll manage things with or without You. If You want to help, that's great, but if You don't, I can get along without You." That's how we think. Assume every child comes into the world not believing that God is fully good. That means that somewhere down deep in the soul of my little granddaughter, somewhere down deep in the soul of my one-year-old grandson, there is a basic terror. There is

a basic terror that says, “No one is here for me the way I need someone to be here for me. I am, therefore, defenseless and I need a defender, but there is nobody there.” Then abuse occurs in some form, perhaps mild, perhaps severe, as I’ve been describing.

Now suppose that little child honestly evaluated the abuse. Suppose they honestly perceived with their capacity to perceive—they perceived accurately what happened and they were to say, “Someone mistreated me and it was not my fault, and I have no means to protect myself from having it happen again.” What happens to their terror? It escalates. It gets worse. Since they see no God who was there for them, they conclude, “I must protect myself.” So, how do they protect themselves? Well, they can’t protect themselves from abuse; that’s been proven; they’re little children; they’re five years old. How can they guarantee that another bad person is not going to come along and do it again? I want you to listen to this. This little girl, five-year-old girl that’s been abused, if she believes that she’s at the mercy of a hostile and dangerous world, that she has no defense, then she lives in unbearable terror. If, however, she concludes this bad thing happened because I caused it; if it’s my fault and I’m doing something wrong, then maybe I have power to keep it from happening again. Maybe within my resources I can see to it, if I change in certain ways, I’m not at the mercy of this difficult world. If it’s my fault, then maybe I can correct it.”

So, she forms an image of herself that’s bad in order to gain power. “I see myself as bad. I can work at being a sweet little girl that nobody would do this to, an angry, hostile person that nobody would want to do this to, a totally neutralized, neutered feminine person that nobody would be drawn to. I’m going to find some way to see to it this never happens again. It’s within my power.” I call that the defensive function of a bad self-image.

What I want you to hear from that is that a bad self-image is not learned; it’s chosen. This carries huge implications for how we do SoulCare, for how we think about each other when we hear stories that are difficult. We need to realize that if somebody tells you about their history of abuse and they begin to hate themselves, that the self-hatred is not the result of bad education that now can be corrected with good education. Try talking somebody out of a bad self-image and see how far you get; you never get very far. Why? Because the problem with this little girl who has been abused and now thinks she’s this dirty little bad thing, the problem is not misinformation, and the problem is not even what happened to her, as awful and dreadful as that was. The real problem is moral. And listen to a very difficult sentence. And this sweet little girl who has been abused, who of course we feel badly for, who of course you want to protect from any further incidents of this nature, but in this little girl there is a determination to believe a lie. Something in her is determined to believe what is not true.

Remember where it all starts: with the conviction that God is not good enough to be fully trusted with my deepest desires of necessity; therefore, I will deny the desires that I cannot satisfy, and God isn’t going to, and I will live for desires that I can somehow manage and I will make sure that I do whatever it takes to get these desires satisfied and when something bad happens I will look very frantically inside to say, “What did I do wrong that I can change? I was terrible here (bad self-image). It’s useful to believe that because now I have something to go to work on to keep myself safe. And now all the pressure is on me, and now I’ve got to handle my world on my own.” That’s that thirty-five-year-old woman that you had lunch with yesterday. That’s the woman who

is struggling with her relationships. It all begins with a naturally embedded rebellious attitude towards God.

You and I have the capacity to perceive, but this capacity to perceive has been corrupted. Only the Lord Jesus, from the time of His conception through His entire life, with His capacity to perceive was not subject to a corruption. He was not foolish; He always looked at the data and drew the right conclusion. The right conclusion is God is good. God knows what He is doing. God can be trusted. And when I am twelve years old, I must be about my Father's business because what matters more than anything else is glorifying my Father and staying in fellowship with my Father. What twelve-year-old thinks like that? Only one. Every other twelve-year-old, every other five-year-old, every other thirty-year-old, every other sixty-year-old, takes a very different position. The position that says: "I'm not sure if God really is good enough to be trusted."

Oswald Chambers put it well when he said, "The root of all sin is the suspicion that God is not good." And because He may not be good, I will look at what happens, whether it's abuse, job loss, or divorce, I will look at all the difficult things that happen in my world and I will say to myself, "I will find a way to make my life work." The Bible teaches us that you and I, as people with the capacity to perceive, have foolishness wound up in our hearts. Foolishness is the corruption of our capacity to perceive, and in order to understand people and their problems so we can provide effective SoulCare, it's crucial that we understand what the Bible means when the Bible tells us that we are foolish.

What I'm going to do in our next presentation is I'm going to look at how all this foolishness begins in every child when he's born and goes through a variety of stages until, apart from the work of the Spirit, the foolishness grows into a full weed and a person becomes a fool. We're going to realize that without the work of the Spirit, we're all headed toward becoming fools. Let's understand that in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

What defensive purpose does a poor self-image serve? In other words, how does a poor self-image help people to feel in control of their well-being?

Discuss how bad things that happen to people shape people's false perception about life.

Lesson 6 Study Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb stresses that foolishness is a passionate conviction, and explains how the congenital disease of foolishness begins to spread and take root in a child's heart.

When you complete this lesson, "Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare," you should be able to:

- Understand the proverb: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child" (Proverbs 22:15).
- Recognize foolishness as (a) a core moral disease in each of us and (b) the root of all our personal problems.
- Cite the two passionate convictions of foolishness.
- Understand the first three of the seven stages of foolishness.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Six: Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

In this presentation I want to describe the seven stages of foolishness. Each of us begins life with what the Bible calls foolishness. The Proverbs teach us that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child and unless the Spirit of God moves, that foolishness will develop until the person becomes a fool. How does foolishness develop? By the seven stages that I want to talk about in this presentation. Let me tell you why I want to do this. I want us to see clearly what a morally unbelieving mess we are. And I want us to see this, not to discourage us, I want us to see this, not so we look in the mirror and get disgusted by what we see, but I want us to see it so that we understand not only how we got this way, but how incredible the Gospel is, and how essential the Gospel is.

You see, most counseling, which I want SoulCare to change, most counseling is a matter of socializing the flesh. It's a matter of taking foolish ways of thinking and dressing them up to make them more socially acceptable. What the Gospel does is it takes foolishness and it condemns it, it exposes it, it makes us look at how we are living foolishly and say, "That really is terrible, but I have a whole new way to live." There is a whole different wisdom, a whole different energy, and this is what my heart is drawn to. I want us to see the wonder of the Gospel, the wonder of the New Covenant, the wonder of what Jesus Christ has done. That's why I want to talk, at some length now, of the seven stages of foolishness. You must understand that these stages describe all of us. Remember a passage in the book of Genesis in Noah's day, where God looked down on the people and He said, "From the time that they were children, all the inclinations of their heart has been evil. All the time, from the time they were children, every inclination of their heart was evil." Now think about that sentence. Suppose you had been around in the days of Noah, before the flood, and you saw a little three-year-old girl who's as pretty as my granddaughter. You saw a one-year-old boy who's as charming and delightful as my grandson. You saw these cute little kids; were their hearts evil all the time? Was that obvious? And the answer is no; it wasn't always obvious no more than it's obvious that my grandchildren have inclinations that apart from the Spirit of God are evil all the time.

What are we talking about? How does that work? How does foolishness develop? When we see this, we are going to celebrate the Gospel as never before, and maybe when we celebrate the Gospel, the Gospel is going to rule in our conversations. And we are going to realize SoulCare is not the practice of technique, SoulCare is the release of the Gospel. Maybe we'll come to realize that by looking at what foolishness is all about.

Let me define what I believe the Bible means when it tells us that foolishness is bound up in our hearts and that people can sometimes be called fools. Remember the rich farmer whose crops were doing well? Stock market was going up, he was making lots of money, and his attitude was,

“I’ve got it made. I’m going to build bigger barns to hold all my grain and I’m going to enjoy my wealth.” And God came along and said, “You’re a fool. Because what you have gained does nothing for your soul.” You have no understanding of SoulCare because you’re foolish. What’s foolishness? Let me define it in a couple of ways; I’m not sure if there’s one clear, precise definition that says everything that needs to be said, so let me just ramble through a couple of thoughts and see if together they don’t give us a feeling for what foolishness is.

Let’s begin by suggesting this: Foolishness is a passionate conviction. You and I have the capacity to desire, as image-bearers, and the capacity to perceive, to look at the world, to look at data and form conclusions and develop convictions, and sometimes the convictions that we hold are passionate. If I were to say, living in a new city or visiting a new city, that I’m going to go to this particular restaurant from my hotel, and my belief is that the restaurant is to the right about two blocks—and that’s my belief. It’s not very passionate; that’s what I understood to be the case. And you live there, and you say to me, “Larry, where are you going?” And I tell you where I am heading. And you say, “Well, you’re not going to get there by going to the right. It’s down left about two miles.” What would happen to my conviction? It would change like that. A little bit of education and my belief changes.

Foolishness is not like that. Foolishness is a passionate, deeply embedded conviction; start with that. It is not changeable by education. It’s changeable only by the power of the Spirit, which is often released through community, through SoulCare. Start with the first thought—foolishness is a passionate conviction—and then continue by saying this...that it’s a passionate conviction about something, and here’s what it’s about: It’s a passionate conviction that we need something other than God, and whatever He chooses to provide, to satisfy the deepest longing of our soul. Foolishness says, “Glad I have God. Good, I’m saved and going to heaven. That’s a good deal, but I know what I need to be satisfied: I need to have a better marriage, need to have a better job, better ministry, better self-esteem, more psychological health, better physical health. That’s what I need, I need the blessings of God; God Himself isn’t the point; He’s useful; He’s not somebody I worship and enjoy and relate to; He’s simply there as a useful, powerful being so I can have what I really need.”

That’s foolishness. It’s a passionate conviction that something other than God deeply satisfies. It’s also a passionate conviction that nothing matters more than my immediate sense of satisfaction. Foolishness is a conviction that says that what matters right now is that my soul feels satisfied—that’s the point of everything, that’s what I am going to live for, that’s why I am going to church, that’s why I am going to sing, that’s why I am going to raise my hands, that’s why I am going to read my Bible, that’s why I’ll be nice to my wife, that’s why I’ll have devotions in the morning, because what matters most is my satisfaction, and that’s all that really is, and that’s the point, and in the absence of my satisfaction, I better live to get it. Nothing matters more than the experience of my satisfaction. That’s foolishness.

It’s a passionate conviction. It’s not a mistake of misperception from faulty education. It’s a passionate conviction that I want to believe. I want to believe a lie. It’s a passionate conviction that my experience of satisfaction matters more than anything else in the world and that God is not reliably up to the job of providing satisfaction, so I better work hard to make sure that I get it, work hard religiously to persuade Him to give it to me, or work hard practically to get what I

need to feel the experience of satisfaction. We're foolish people. Every child begins life with a natural inclination to pursue personal satisfaction as their number one agenda and to find that satisfaction in some source other than God. Now, again, I want you to recall there's nothing wrong biblically with desiring satisfaction. I'm not condemning our desire for satisfaction. The Bible doesn't condemn it. In Jeremiah 2, God looks at His people and He says, "You're thirsty people who are going to the wrong place to satisfy your thirst." He never condemns the thirst. The thirst is legitimate. The thirst is what, when embraced, drives us to God. When we see what we really long for, then we go to God. Primarily to relieve our thirst? No, primarily for Him, which in the process relieves our thirst. What God condemns is not the thirst but going to the wrong place to satisfy the thirst.

How does all this work? Seven stages in the development of foolishness. Stage number one: The very first year of life (age zero to one) I call the stage of naïve foolishness. Now recall the verse that I just quoted to you. In Genesis it says this, in Genesis chapter 6, before the Flood came in Noah's day: "Every inclination" God said, and I want to give you a bit of a free translation here, "every inclination of the heart of people is to move away from Me and that has been true since the day they were born." That's what the book of Genesis says. Every inclination is evil all the time and it has been true from their childhood, from their earliest days.

I want you to think of a baby's heart. We just had a dedication service for a grandniece of mine and she's about a month old, and there's this darling little precious bundle of new life. And when I look at this little child, I think a lot of things. She bears the image of God. Her joy will depend on relationship. She has a capacity to desire what God alone provides. She has a capacity to perceive that God is everything. But this cute little thing has a problem. She's got a fatal disease in her brain, in her mind; she perceives wrongly. She's got foolishness bound up in her heart. What does that mean? Think of this little child as a river of energy flowing away from God. That river is moving in no particular direction yet, other than away from God. It may not be moving toward natural beauty, physical beauty, or academic achievement, or getting a bunch of guys to fall in love with her. She's a one-month-old baby, but she has a natural energy that is saying without her consciousness—she has no language skills yet—but there is a natural energy in her that's saying that the deepest desires of my image-bearing soul are going to be satisfied by moving away from God; that's a serious problem.

That's a fatal problem, and it's true in every child that is born except for Jesus. It's a profound natural energy that is present in the first year of life that believes that a state of happiness can be found by receiving some set of experiences from people that put the child's needs first.

I believe something that's contrary to many of my psychological colleagues. I believe that we make a terrible mistake when we speak of children as innocent. I believe that when we think of a child as having a self that is fundamentally, if not good, at least innocent, and many people believe that this innocent child is someone who is somehow corrupted by a bad environment and therefore becomes selfish; that's just not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that a child is not innocent. This doctrine of depravity that doesn't get talked about much these days is in the Bible, and it says from childhood up every inclination is evil. "In sin did my mother conceive me." Not that the act of sexual intercourse was sin, but at the moment of conception, the energy of sin was dominant in the human personality.

Every child learns specific patterns of selfishness, but every child is born selfish. That's a terrible mistake to believe otherwise, to talk about innocence. Most approaches to counseling, and I'm sure there are exceptions to this, but most approaches to counseling assume that an innocent self has been damaged by emotional trauma and the job of counseling is to repair the damage to restore the innocence. That's not biblical. That's not SoulCare. That's not true. SoulCare assumes that the person in front of you has never been innocent. Only Adam and Eve were innocent, and that only up until they fell. The problem came out of shaped selfishness. The problem of every child depends on the selfishness being shaped, not being caused by trauma, but shaped by trauma; there's a world of difference in the two.

There is no such thing as an innocent child. And when we understand that, when we're talking to a fifty-year-old person who's struggling with memories of a painful divorce and the person is feeling like he's been so terribly victimized,—and of course they have been, in horrible ways—when we understand that we are not talking with somebody who at some point was innocent and damaged, we are talking to somebody who, from the time they were born, their natural little fist was raised in the face of God basically saying, “You're not enough; You ought to be better than You are; I'll take over my life and You really ought to cooperate, and if You don't, I have a legitimate gripe against You; is that clear?” That's pretty ugly. That's why Jesus had to die, because what's in me is really, really ugly. Stage one: naïve foolishness, unshaped energy that is oriented to the self and has nothing to do with glorifying God. The natural energy of the human soul at birth.

Stage two: The stage that I call learned foolishness. Or maybe a better phrase could be shaped foolishness. Foolishness is already there, but now specific patterns are learned. The specific direction this natural river of energy moving away from God is now shaped into a particular stream. And one child goes this way, and one child goes this way, and one child goes a third way, but all children go away from God and all move in some wrong direction. They're shaped. They're learning something in their earliest stages and this is the stage of early childhood. I believe it happens from ages two to five.

From ages two to five, a child begins to realize that his world is a world of relationships. More than a breast, more than a big person who changes diapers and puts you to bed. A child at age two and on to three, and four, and five, becomes more visibly and self-consciously, a relational being and enters the world of relationships and begins to realize that this world of relationships provides either joy or sorrow, either pleasure or pain. And this child begins to realize from age two to five that certain things happen in a relationship that produce happiness and good feelings and they begin to say, “That's what I want.” There are certain things happen that produce sorrow and sadness and frustration and anger and tension and their reaction is, “That's not what I want. I want life, a certain kind of relationship. I don't want death, another kind of relationship.”

It's very interesting when you're talking to people at an intimate level, talking to a fellow adult, to ask them to think back on some of their earlier years. There's a value to talking about the early stories of our lives. And one of the values is to begin to realize how our flesh, how our foolish inclinations have been shaped by our relational encounters. And to encourage someone that you're chatting with as you're involved in SoulCare and getting to know somebody and explore them and discover them, part of the exploration might include a sentence like this: “I would love for you to talk to me about the things that you remember happening to you when you were a little girl or little boy. What relational encounters took place?”

What you can assume as you ask that question is that no matter how wonderful the parents, and there are parents who are wonderful, no matter how awful the parents, and there are parents who are awful, but even if the parents were the wonderful variety, godly people who loved their kids and played with them and disciplined them fairly and read the Bible to them, no matter how wonderful the parents, no matter how consistent, no matter how loving, no matter how firm, no matter how kind, every child is an idolater who demands from the parent what the parent cannot give. Every child looks at her parent and says, “I demand a perfect relationship from you, because my soul-needs that I have—desires of necessity—I don’t turn toward God, so you’re the ones that are available. I know I need relationship. Mom and Dad do it, and do it perfectly.” Every child, as a result, no matter how good the parent is, is fundamentally going to experience disappointments.

Every child is going to experience some level of pain, because every child is an idolater. Whatever makes the child feel especially good, becomes a child’s goal. When I spend time with my granddaughter, I love making her feel good. I love buying her things. I love picking her up and saying, “I just want to hold you because you’re so beautiful. I just want to give you a kiss because I love you so much. I want to read you a book; get a book and Pop-Pop is going to read to you. I got time for you little girl.” I love doing that. And I love having her “ooh,” you know, and run off and get a book and come back and jump up on my lap; I mean that’s, I guess it isn’t heaven, but it kind of feels close. And you know, I think it feels close to heaven for her, and I think it’s good that I do that. Don’t misunderstand here; I think it’s wonderful that I have the opportunity to move toward my granddaughter and be a blessing in her life. But just the fact that I’m a pretty good Pop-Pop isn’t going to change her soul. It requires the work of the Spirit that I can’t control. Because what she’s going to do, is she’s going to say, to herself, as a perceiving person who has foolishness bound up in her heart, who’s saying, “I’m going to find some way to make life work without God and now this wonderful relational encounter with my Pop-Pop, with my Nana, with my wonderful Dad and my wonderful Mommy and all these wonderful things...I know what life is.” And now her foolishness gets shaped. “People jolly well better see me as special. And when I walk in a room, people better get excited, because that’s how life works.”

Now imagine that attitude when she is fifteen years old. At age three, it’s cute and we love it. She just runs up and says, “Here I am,” and we say, “Yes, you are here; that’s wonderful.” At age fifteen, she walks into a party and her attitude is, “Hey, I’m here. You people better take notice. You didn’t take notice, you jerks. I’m so mad at you. I’ll get you to take notice. You want to sleep with me? I’m so shy, nobody wants me. I’m not going to go to a party.” All kind of bad things happen. Why?

Because from ages two to five her foolishness is getting shaped from her relational encounters, even the good ones. As well as, of course, the bad ones, when she hurts in particular ways and things happen where people are maybe unkind to her. And she’s going to experience that of course more as she’s in a nursery school now and her playmates are going to do unkind things to her at times and a nursery school teacher is going to ignore her when she’s hurting and she’s going to say, “This world isn’t a safe place and I know what death is. And in my foolishness I am determined I’m not going to experience that again. In my foolishness I am going to experience that. That’s what I want, not that. God? Oh, yeah, I appreciate Pop-Pop’s stories about God. He’s irrelevant to it of course, because I know what I want; I want this and I want that.” Her foolishness is being shaped.

You see, every child from ages two to five develops what I call a sensual mat. Deeply felt experiences become their guidepost. The good experiences are defined as life; that's what I'm going to get. My foolishness says that's life. Deeply felt bad experiences become interpreted as death; that hurts, I'm not going to experience that ever again. It's important for parents and grandparents to understand that all the Bible education, all the lectures in honesty, all the fun times in the playground, all the birthday parties with all the cake you want to eat tonight, and all the discipline in the world—add it all up, there's no power. There's no power to deal with the disease that your child has. There's no power to replace foolishness with wisdom. All I can do, as a mother or dad or grandmother or grandfather or schoolteacher or Bible teacher or pastor, all I can do is redirect foolishness. It takes the Spirit of God. It takes the power of the Gospel to replace foolishness with wisdom. Apart from the Spirit's work, our efforts can only socialize foolishness. Stage two: the stage of learned foolishness.

As a child begins to learn some understanding of what's happening in their lives, they have a natural energy to find life apart from God; call that the flesh, call that foolishness. They experience the second enemy of the soul. The first is foolishness. The flesh, the second enemy, is the world of relational encounters that are both good and bad. The third enemy is the Devil, who teaches through relational encounters how foolishness can be shaped for the child to make his or her life work as well as possible. The child ends the stage of learned foolishness at age five with an idea of how to make life work. Stage two foolishness is developing. Stage three, ages six to twelve: what I call the stage of practiced foolishness.

During late childhood, from six to roughly twelve, the beginning of adolescence, the child's relational world, of course, expands. And now the little boy, the little girl, goes to school and they go to Sunday school, and they go to different sports endeavors and join soccer teams and softball teams, and what they do from ages six to twelve is they begin to try out their patterns of foolishness and see what works. It's a chance to refine their pattern to try it out and see what is going to make sense. Notice what a little girl is saying to herself; a little boy at age seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve; the little child is saying this: "What I learned in my stage of shaped foolishness is I want A. That's what I'm after. I want to feel like I felt when Pop-Pop read the book. I like that feeling. I want A. Now I am going to figure out I want B. Let's change the letters here: I want B. I want that to happen. What is the A that leads to B? What do I do that makes this happen? My goal is B; my strategy is A; what do I do? Now I have the chance in my larger relational world, from ages six to twelve, to practice it and see how it all works."

When our older boy was in third grade, the phone rang and we received that dreaded message: "This is your son's schoolteacher. I would like to have a parent conference as soon as possible." I was in private practice as a psychologist at the time, I was teaching a course at the Christian school where our children were attending on parenting, and the schoolteacher called up Rachael and me and asked for a meeting. We went in to meet with the schoolteacher. It was her first year teaching and she was a little nervous in meeting with parents of a child and she said to me—she looked a little bit more at me than she looked at my wife—and she said, "I need to tell you something, get your input so we can work together on behalf of your son, but something I've noticed about your boy—your son always wants to be noticed. Whenever I ask a question, his hand shoots up and he waves and kind of demands that I call on him and he may know the answer or he may not, but he wants to be the one who's visible in class. And the reason I called you is just

yesterday when he raised his hand and just was waving it angrily, wanting to be called on, and I was trying to call on some other kids, I turned to him and I said, ‘I want you to put your hand down. I am not going to call on you today.’ And when the school bell rang and the children all ran out to the school bus, your son stopped at my desk, looked at me and said, ‘I hate you.’ And ran out the door.”

And then the schoolteacher looked at me, and she said, “Dr. Crabb, can you explain what’s happening here? I don’t have a clue.”

So I said, “Well I’ll ponder that. I’ll think about that and we’ll get back if God gives us wisdom.” So a week later, I had a clue. My wife and I we’re driving home one evening from a social event with some friends of ours, and Kep and Ken, our two sons, were in the back seat and Rachael and I were in the front; I was driving to our home and we’d had a wonderful evening. Good friends of ours, they have some kids our kids’ age, and we just had a good fun evening—the backyard barbecue kind of a fun time. Well, it turned out that our friends had good friends of theirs who we didn’t know visiting with them, and these good friends happened to be professional concert Christian musicians. And in the course of the evening, most of the entire evening aside from eating, was spent listening to these incredibly talented people give us a private concert. We all loved it. The kids loved it. The adults loved it. It was great. We had a fantastic night, and driving home that night I remember thinking to myself, “This is family life at its best. This is the way things are supposed to be. It’s good for me. It’s good for my wife. It’s good for my kids, and we’re just driving home and I am happy in the blessings of God.”

And I hear my son pipe up, and he says, “Hey, Dad.”

“Yeah, what did you want?”

He said, “Want to tell you something.”

“What’s that?” Assuming he wanted to tell me how blessed he was to be in our family.

And what he said was, “Really felt sorry for you tonight.”

“You felt sorry for me tonight? Why?”

“Well, because tonight you weren’t the star.”

I began to think...Any place we traveled when our kids were little—we traveled quite a bit—it was usually for me to speak at a church. We’d go into a church building, sometimes big churches, lots of people, and within a few minutes, I was behind the pulpit. I was the one who was getting all the attention. And I wondered if I somehow communicated to my son, that’s life. I love it. I only go where I am noticed. I wonder if my son, from ages two to five, picked up some foolishness from his dad, that life exists in being noticed. And I wonder if his belief, if his foolishness got shaped into a perception where he said, “I’m going to be like Dad. I’m going to be noticed. I’m going to be a star. I’m going to pick the other people to play in the baseball team. I’m going to be the star athlete and in class I’m going to be the one waving the hand.”

When the teacher said, “Put your hand down,” my son saw the teacher as denying him the opportunity to live. The stage of practiced foolishness.

In our next presentation, I want to continue looking at these stages and look next at what happens when the child moves in the teenage years and enters the stage of disillusioned foolishness. We’ll look at that in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

Why is it vital to personally and practically understand foolishness in order to properly and profoundly appreciate the Gospel?

How does belief in “naïve foolishness” (stage 1) contradict the idea of childhood innocence?

Discuss (personally) how specific styles of foolishness were learned in your early years.

Lesson 7 Study Guide

CC202

SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare
(Continued)

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb explains how sin, unchecked by the Holy Spirit, grows in the depths of the human heart through all the stages of life, from cradle to grave.

When you complete this lesson, “Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare (Continued),” you should be able to:

- Understand what lies beneath the angst (confusion, despair, emptiness) that so many teenagers experience.
- Identify the two vital ingredients of powerful parenting that parents can provide for their struggling teenagers.
- Recognize the hidden workings of foolishness beneath the “successful” lives of seemingly mature adult Christians.
- Develop a clearer understanding of how sin, unchecked by the Holy Spirit, grows in the depths of the human heart from cradle to grave.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Seven: Foolishness: The Enemy of SoulCare (Continued)

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

We're going to look at stage four in the seven stages of how foolishness develops in the human personality. We've talked about the fact that in stage one, from [age] zero to one, every child is naïve in their foolishness. There's no particular direction. In that sense, they're innocent, but they are not innocent in the final sense, because there is a direction away from God.

And then in the second stage, ages two to five, the stage of what I call learned, or shaped foolishness, that natural river of energy away from God takes a particular direction based on relational encounters.

And then in stage three, as the child's relational world expands, from ages six to twelve, they begin to practice and refine their foolish strategies for making life work.

And now, stage four: adolescence, teenage years, what I call the stage of disillusioned or disappointed foolishness. In these ages, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, up through eighteen, in that vicinity at least, what happens most often—and maybe as your memory serves you well and you go back to you teenage years, you can recall some of this—you began to realize that some of the strategies that you thought were going to make life work well for you, they didn't work. And you began to realize that you were not as powerful as you thought you were. You began to realize that all the ploys that you had developed—of waving your hand in class and saying, “Teacher, look at me; I'm going to be the star,” that when you are fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, you got cut from the football team, you didn't become the star quarterback, you didn't make the cheerleader squad, and you are disappointed, and you're disillusioned. Something inside of you just sags, and dies, and feels desperate and feels empty.

A strange feeling begins to creep into the soul of a teenager that rarely can a teenager identify or deal with very well—but a strange feeling of emptiness, of aloneness, of rage, of frustration, all of those emotions I include under the general category of disillusionment or disappointed foolishness. And so now when a teenage young man or young woman begins to experience this sense of dissatisfaction from their foolish strategies not working, then they begin to realize the emptiness that is in their souls and they are not sure if they know how to relieve it. They're vulnerable.

Enter the opportunity for sex. Enter the opportunity for drugs. Enter the opportunity for achievement, in the classroom, on the athletic field. Enter the opportunity for sarcastic humor taught by most sitcoms. Enter the opportunity for anger expressed that makes other people cower in your presence. Enter the opportunity to do something relationally that establishes you, at least for a moment, as somebody who's there, and who feels better for the moment because of the

rage and the violent tendencies that are within you. Enter exciting youth groups. Enter music that stirs your soul. Enter passionate community. All things that foolishness can attach itself to. If none of these opportunities are available or work, enter despair, or suicide. Teenagers are stubbornly foolish, and desperately searching.

They need two things from their adult community, particularly their parents—of course many more things—but two stand out. Number one, what a teenager needs as they wrestle with disillusioned foolishness and experience the internal feelings that make them so vulnerable to addiction, to whatever—all the way from excessive religiosity, to premarital sex—they need two things from their adult community, particularly parents.

Number one: firm boundaries. Firm boundaries, now listen carefully, that are not efforts to control them. Understand parents, parents of two-year-olds, parents of fifteen-year-olds, you cannot control your child. You can control, to a degree, the consequences of what your child does; therefore, you can put in place firm boundaries and say that there is a moral order to this universe and when you do such and such, these things happen; you can bring to bear the reality of God's moral law on your teenage children, but not in a power-struggling way, not in a power-struggling effort to get your children to shape up: "I'm going to do this and you're going to shape up. Is that clear?" Do that and something will rise up in your child and say, "You'll never control me, Dad. You can try all you want. Maybe I'll be good to get use of the car, but you've not changed my heart, and you better be clear, you have no power over me." And I have [seen] a lot of Christian homes, a lot of secular homes. Firm boundaries that are not efforts to control, not efforts to even change your child, but boundaries that are established without angry power struggles, boundaries that are established in a spirit that says something like this: "Son, Daughter, here's how things work in a moral universe. If you don't abide by the rules, then you don't destroy me, and you don't destroy the rules. You really end up harming yourself, and I will give you a taste, to whatever degree I can, of the reality of firm boundaries."

One of our sons who, in his teenage years of disappointed foolishness, went through a pretty significant period of rebellion. If he were talking to you right now, he would say that one of the most significant sentences he heard his father say (and he heard his father say a thousand sentences that weren't very significant), but one sentence he heard his dad say that made a difference to him, as he has since reported it, was this: "You can break all the rules, and when you break the rules you will break my heart, but you cannot destroy me; you don't have that power. I will love God, and I will love your mother, and I will love you, and I will live for God regardless of what you do. You have the power to make me cry, and cry a lot, but you don't have the power to destroy my soul. The power struggle is over. I give rules and I give boundaries and you have no power to destroy me in the process and the rules will continue. God's holiness is intact. You'll either be destroyed by them or you will comply with them. It really is your choice." A mood of strength, not antagonism, and not control—that's one thing a teenager needs during this disappointed foolishness.

The second thing which I believe a teenager needs as he or she is going through this disillusionment of foolish strategies which no longer work and no longer produce the feelings that you want—I would put it this way: They need modeled hope. I know that the usual second thing or first thing would be they need love and involvement, and, of course, I believe in that, but so

many parents are so scared that their kids are not going to believe they love them that they don't provide boundaries, and they don't pursue God. They spend all their energy trying to convince their kids that they're really for them.

The question is not—don't convince your kids that you love, rather, love them. And if the love is real, the kids will pick it up and if your love for God is central, what you will provide for your kids are firm boundaries and modeled hope. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Modeled hope: a parent who says effectively to his teenage son or daughter by the way he lives, by the way the mom or dad lives. A parent that says this, not unkindly, not arrogantly, but truthfully, "I found what you haven't. I found what you're looking for, and you don't even know you're looking for. I want you to find out what I found. I want you to discover the reality that I discovered, but I can't make you find it. I intend to live my life, not to impress you, not to change you, but to live realistically in front of you, pursuing God, letting you know that I live in the same world you live in. That I struggle with a lot of things. I'm not going to let you pretend that I don't struggle because you're going to see me hurt. You're going to see me struggle. You're going to see me cry. You're going to see me lose my temper. You're going to see me live this journey, but in the middle of all of this, there's a hope that, when you see, it will puzzle you. It will attractively puzzle you. And it will create in you, perhaps (I pray; I can't make this happen), a mood of listening to somebody who has a hope that you desperately want but don't have. I'm imposing nothing. I am modeling what you most deeply desire." That's what a parent can give a teenage child. The absence of that can be a disastrous relationship for mom and dad with that teenage child.

A child often survives the teenage years, sometimes well, sometimes not so well, but after age eighteen, as they move into early adulthood, nineteen, twenty up until thirty, they enter what I call stage five: the stage of rearranged foolishness. As the day dawns when the young person is in the middle of college, perhaps finishing college, age twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, and they begin to start thinking about, "You know, Dad's not going to be paying the mortgage for me. I've got to figure out a way to pay some rent for a little apartment somewhere, and insurance on my car, and I've got some practical things, and I'm kind of falling in love with this guy over here. I might get married and have kids someday. My goodness, I'm entering a whole new world. I better rearrange the way I'm approaching things, because now what I want may no longer be the same thing I wanted when I was four and five, or eight and ten, or fourteen and sixteen. Now it's not just being popular at the school dance, or throwing the winning touchdown pass as the quarterback of the high school football team. Now I want to pay the bills and raise a kid. And now I've got to rearrange my thinking. I'm after different things. New strategies are required."

As we begin now to think a little differently about life in the stage of rearranged foolishness, young adulthood, I can recall when I finished college. I was about twenty-one and I was graduating from undergraduate school and I was in love with Rachael and I wanted to get married and thinking all these things: "I've got to pay the bills and I have three hundred dollars to my name. That's not going to last a long time. And I have a bachelor's degree in psychology. It's hard to get a job that I want, at least from a bachelor's degree in psychology." So I began to think about, "Well, what do I want to do?"

And I believe that the Spirit was involved in this, but there was a real portion of my own life where there was just a rearrangement of my foolish understanding of life. "What am I good at? How can

I make my life work? Here I am, and I want my life to work.” I felt no real sense of calling. I wish I could be one of those fortunate people who at age sixteen felt a call to be a missionary in Africa, and I never had that. I chose psychology as a major, didn’t like anything else. I don’t know what to do. I’ve often thought if I write an autobiography I’ll call it *Sovereign Stumbling*. I stumbled, and God was sovereign. Kingdom purposes were not primary in my mind when I finished college. I was twenty-one, about to get married, needed a way to make a living. So what did I do? What do you do in the stage of rearranged foolishness?

Keep that question in your mind as I employ a metaphor that might help us think this through. I want you to visualize something that most of you can relate to. Most of you, as I have, have gone into a mall; you’ve gone into a large city, suburban mall, perhaps. It’s unfamiliar to you. And when you get into the mall, it’s huge. You don’t know where you are. You want to get to the shoe store that’s having the good sale. What’s the first thing you do when you get into an unfamiliar mall? Well, you look for the directory. And on the directory, you look for the dot, usually a red dot, that says what? You are here.

At age twenty-one, I looked at the red dot in the mall and said, “You are here.” Twenty-one, about to get married, don’t have a job, don’t know how I’m going to make a living, don’t know what I want to do with my life. What do I want? Well, I know where I am. Where do I want to be? And I began to visualize myself in this mall. I didn’t use the mall imagery back in that day, but I began to visualize myself thinking, “Well, here I am, twenty-one and broke and in love, and I want to have a home and kids and I want to have a better life. I want to have a good life. I want to have a well-managed life. I want to have a life that I can manage so it works. That’s what I want. I know what I’m after. I want the good life. I’m a Christian, so I want the Christian good life. Going to include church. Going to take my kids to Sunday school class. Going to pray before dinner. Not going to have affairs on my wife. Not going to go to pornography places. I am going to be a Christian guy. I know what I want. I am here. I want to be there. So how do I get from here to there?”

That’s the question that you have in the mall. You find out where you are. You find out where you want to go. You determine the path to get there. Well, that’s what I did. That’s what I believe all of us do on some level, and I determined that, given the resources that I have, I am very, very good at very, very little, and so I decided, “Well, where do I have some talents? I’m not very good at engineering, no point in going to engineering school. I don’t like math and calculus. I don’t like chemistry and biology, so medical school is out. I love to be in athletics, but I am kind of a mediocre athlete, so what’s left? Well, you know, I kind of like thinking about people. I kind of like philosophy type things and maybe I’ll be a psychologist. It kind of combines thinking sort of philosophically and abstractly with what’s happening in people’s hearts and souls. I’ll go to graduate school; I’ll get a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. I could probably get a pretty good job with that. I think that will work. If I get a Ph.D. in psychology, I’ll be able to go from where I am to where I want to be, and I’ll make a decent living, and I’ll be able to afford a home and I’ll be able to afford to have children and I’ll know a few things, maybe that I can be effective as a father and as a husband and as a friend. And, hey, life’s going to work.” What was the end point? What’s the end point of most of our lives as we rearrange our foolishness to pursue a goal? The end point—nothing to do with God. Nothing to do with the glory of God. What is SoulCare all about? Helping people lead a well-managed life? Or encouraging the human soul to live out its destiny of enjoying God?

As SoulCarers, we have our work cut out for us, because the natural inclination of each of our hearts, mine included, is to go from the dot where I am in the mall to where I want to be, to the better life, and to find some way to make it work. And I rearranged my foolishness. No longer did I play a whole lot of sports. I was a decent tennis player, but I never could make a buck playing tennis, so I dropped tennis and I went into psychology, because that would work for me. And it did work. I earned my doctorate, I've written some books, made a living as a psychologist—a decent life. On the way to becoming a fool.

The next stage, stage six: the stage of stable foolishness. Again, understand that all these stages assume that the Spirit has not been working. Apart from the Spirit, this is what happens. With the Spirit, things can be different at any stage. Without the Spirit, this is the natural flow of the energy of foolishness, beginning with a baby and moving on now into adulthood. Stage number six: age thirty, thirty-one, up until retirement years, sixty-five, seventy, adulthood.

When you care for somebody's soul, when you're involved in talking to an adult, if they're adults, and if they're out of their twenties, and if they're pre-retirement, you can assume, in many cases, that either they found a stable pattern that has provided them with something close to the life that they want and they are, therefore, reasonably satisfied and God is window dressing, or they wish they could find a strategy that would get them to the better life that they want. That's in all of us. Minimum hassles, maximum comfort.

SoulCare understands that in the core of people, that's the direction we go. And if we are successful, we become stable in our foolishness. I have sometimes thought that perhaps the greatest mistake that we make in our churches—and we make a number of mistakes in our churches; I make a number of mistakes in my ministry—but perhaps the greatest mistake we make in our churches is to wrongly define maturity. Think in your church circles: Who do you know—somebody who is fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty—who would you say has been walking with the Lord for a long time, and you would say, "That guy's mature; that lady's a mature saint"? What made you say they were mature? Sometimes I believe what we do is we see the mature person as one who has found his or her niche, and lives it out successfully and productively and happily. Are you hearing what I am saying? That person who is mature by that definition may be nothing other than a stable fool. Maybe they found a pattern of foolishness that makes their life work just wonderfully.

Perhaps the greatest mistake is to wrongly define maturity. Think of who it is in your church world, in your community of Christians, that you look up to and say, "That person's mature." What about them makes you say they're mature? Well in some cases, not all, you may be looking, as I sometimes do, at a person older than me and say, "There's a person who has found their niche; there's a person who has been successful in their career, their ministry, they've been productive, they're happy, life is going well, their marriage is good, their kids are doing fine," and I say, "Now, that's the model. That's the well-managed life. That's the better life." Is it possible that when I look at certain people and say, "that's maturity" that I'm wrongly defining it? Is it possible that that person I'm calling mature is, in fact, a stable fool?

We so often glibly speak of loving the Lord. And sometimes we say that, believing we mean it, while we leave the "you are here" toward the better life of the well-managed productivity

that foolishness says will really bring us joy. May I suggest, that as we get ourselves involved in SoulCare, that we need to realize that Satan's masterpiece is not the crack addict. Satan's masterpiece is not the prostitute. Satan's masterpiece is the person who is satisfied with this world. Satan's masterpiece is the person who is untroubled by all that is in his or her interior world that's opposed to God. He's content with all the resources that he has to make his life work and he's enjoying respect and recognition and affection and he's never broken before God to the point where he lives for no one but God. That's Satan's masterpiece.

The Spirit's masterpiece is someone that doesn't look very mature sometimes. The Spirit's masterpiece can be someone who is deeply troubled, someone who struggles a lot, someone who is aware of his or her own interior world and doesn't like what's there, someone who's troubled by the world in which they live, someone who therefore cries out to God, "Reveal Yourself to me. You're all that I want. There's nothing in my perception that can satisfy me except You. I know it's You." That's not foolishness. That's wisdom, and the person that's crying out to God for satisfaction may look very unstable, may not have a good job, may not have very much money. They may not be chipper and happy all the time, but if that person is, in fact, the Spirit's masterpiece, all that may be going on—there's still going to be a pattern of kindness, a pattern of movement toward other people, and a pattern of abiding trust in God through struggles along the way.

If you and I are going to practice SoulCare, we're going to need the gift of discernment. We're going to need to develop a discernment, a wisdom, that enables us to say, "That's the evidence of the flesh. That's foolishness. That's stable foolishness. That's not good. That's the Spirit's working—it's not what people find attractive." It's not what people are drawn to until they really see what's in their soul; then they're drawn to it.

Folks, we've just got to get away from the idea that if you're spiritual, you're successful. We've got to reach in to the realization that the more spiritual you are, the more broken and troubled you become as you pursue the reality of God. Yes, there's joy. Yes, there's stability of soul, there's solidness, but along the way, there's a price to pay. A man whose internal battle is fierce may cling to the truth of his new identity in Christ enough to keep him going; that's the Spirit's masterpiece. Without discernment, we may look at somebody and say, "That person's immature, and we may be judgmental toward them and annoyed by them, and tell them to shape up, and be a little happier. Why can't you be a little nicer more of the time?" and we may not be aware of the Spirit's working in their souls. Discernment requires a recognition of foolishness, and how it can disguise itself very attractively, especially in the church.

The seventh stage, from retirement years, sixty-five, sixty-eight, seventy until death: the stage that I call the stage of bankrupt foolishness. Let me preface my brief discussion of this last stage by saying that this is necessary for no one to ever enter. But let me also say it's common, to admit that many people do enter this last stage. Living according to New Covenant truth, living according to gospel realities, living according to the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit, results in becoming old without being bankrupt, but being hopeful. Weary, no doubt, in many ways, looking forward to heaven, groaning more than you ever have before, but confident and anchored in the hope that's yours.

Without the Spirit, when you become an older person, you will enter the stage of bankrupt foolishness. What do I mean by that? Again, let me share personally. As I teach this course, my father is eighty-eight years old; certainly he is in the last stages of his earthly existence. My mother is eighty-four, and she lives in an Alzheimer's unit. She knows very little of what's going on. But she does know she's confused and she does know that she feels very alone. There are times her soul is tortured.

The family gathered, most recently, Easter day for a dinner with my mother and dad in the facility in which they live. Mother didn't know anybody—her son (me), her grandchildren, her great grandchildren—she knew nobody. And I believe what happened as her confused mind looked around the room—she had this sense that she should have known these people and didn't. And it tortured her. And when she went back to her room—my father later told me this that evening—after a wonderful Easter dinner together and laughing and having a good time and Mother entering in to it, and laughing somewhat vacuously, but still laughing, she went back to her room, and, as dad described it, she lay across her bed and began pounding her pillow and wailing almost at the top of her lungs, saying, “I'm so confused. I don't know what I am doing. I have no value.” And she said those words. My father is eighty-eight, watching his wife of sixty some years going through this torture and not being able to do anything about it at all. Bankrupt foolishness doesn't describe my father. And the reason it doesn't describe my father is not because he didn't hurt; he hurt bad, as a matter of fact. We talked on the phone, and dad was in tears, and he was saying, “I don't believe in purgatory, but this feels like I'm in it.”

This is hard. And I find myself saying to God, “God why are You allowing this? With the snap of Your finger, You could change it, and You're not doing it. I don't understand it.” And then, after going through this kind of terrible, terrible pain, my father, who is no bankrupt fool, essentially said this to me—and these are close to his words—he says, “You know, I believe the best is yet to come. I believe, wisdom tells me, that the desires of my heart, the deepest desires, are still on track for full, rich satisfaction. My hope is secure. My anchor is holding.”

A number of years ago, B.F. Skinner, the well-known behavioral psychologist, gave a talk to the American Psychological Association. He was in his eighties, close to my father's age, and the talk that he gave was “Growing Old Gracefully as a Psychologist.” B.F. Skinner taught that our choices are controlled. We really don't make choices; our behaviors are controlled by the consequences they produce. We're simply responders to our environment and we do whatever brings a reward and that's all there is to it. And Skinner said this to the audience (I read the address that he gave), “that now as an old man [Skinner speaking] the reinforcers that used to bring satisfaction no longer do, so in order to grow old gracefully, I must step up the intensity of the reinforcers.” And the illustration that he gave was now—as an older man whose taste buds have been dulled, who no longer enjoys a certain level of pleasure—now I have to step up the intensity of the sources of pleasure and now, to grow old gracefully, I must immerse myself in harder-core pornography, and spicier food.

I showed that article to my father, and this was a number of years ago, maybe ten, eleven, twelve, years ago, and Dad said, “Well, I'm getting older. Does that mean when I'm in my eighties that I'll need to get a subscription to *Hustler* and eat nothing but hard-core Mexican food?” That's bankrupt foolishness. I would say, without any pleasure, without any spirit of anger, but with

profound sadness, that Skinner was a bankrupt fool. My father's not a bankrupt fool. The best is yet to come.

My dad is not controlled by foolishness. He has a few foolish thoughts; we all will, until we're dead. But in his last years of life, there's a wisdom that anchors him; and I want that to be true of my life. My father has a relationship with God that's unbreakable and he has a purpose for his existence. He's not sure what it is every day, but he trusts that it's there. That's not foolishness; that's wisdom. Without the Spirit, the best we can do is do our best to get more pleasure any way we can until we die—bankrupt foolishness. When a person dies without Christ, they remain a fool forever.

As we engage in SoulCare, whether it's with disillusioned foolishness stage people—teenagers—or rearranged people, rearranging their foolishness in young adulthood, or people stabilizing their foolishness, or people experiencing the bankruptcy of their foolishness, as we engage in SoulCare, our task is twofold: We must enter the souls of people knowing that foolishness is there and make alive the gospel message. There's forgiveness for all the foolishness, and there's life that moves you in a very different direction; not toward the better life, making things work, but the better hope of knowing God intimately. SoulCarers want to see people move toward the better hope of knowing the Lord intimately. The second thing our task as SoulCarers involves is to enter the souls of Christians still tempted by foolishness and discern its operation so that we can recognize more clearly, and stir up the resources that the Gospel has placed in our souls.

Those are the seven stages of foolishness that reflect how our capacity to perceive has been corrupted. As image-bearers, there are two more capacities to talk about: the capacity to choose, and the capacity to feel, and we'll look at that at our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

As you consider the story Dr. Crabb related about his elderly parents, discuss the difference between “bankrupt foolishness” and what we might call “tortured maturity.”

Discuss two key ingredients to powerful parenting that parents can give their struggling teenagers. Why are these so important?

What causes the disillusioned foolishness that teenagers experience? How does this lead to negative outcomes in their lives?

Lesson 8 Study Guide

CC202

SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Designed to Relate 3 and 4:
The Capacity to Choose
and the Capacity to Feel

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb explores why image-bearers with the God-given capacity to choose so often feel stuck and addicted, unable to freely choose their actions.

When you complete this lesson, “Designed to Relate 3 and 4: The Capacity to Choose and the Capacity to Feel,” you should be able to:

- Recognize image-bearers as people with the capacity to *desire*, to *think*, and to *choose*.
- Understand why image-bearers with the capacity to choose so often feel they are unable to freely choose their actions.
- Explain the relationship between hidden *goals* and compulsive *behaviors*.
- Understand the source of *anxiety*, *rage*, and *self-hatred* or *guilt*.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Eight: Designed to Relate 3 and 4: The Capacity to Choose and the Capacity to Feel

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

A friend recently asked to speak with me. He indicated that he was stuck in his life, that he felt spiritually dry, and didn't know what to do about that. He didn't want to feel this way, but for the past couple of years, actually, he indicated he felt no intimacy with the Lord. He still loved the Lord, but it was more of an academic thing, and he didn't know what to do. And he called and asked if I might offer him spiritual direction. Now, just take a look at that simple, little introduction and think of it very obviously; that here's a man, who says to me that "I have a problem I want to present to you." Call that a presenting problem or call that a reality in the middle of his journey.

And I think I prefer the phrase "a journeying reality"—that he shared with me. So he makes known that he has a particular problem to me. And he puts me in the position—I welcome the position—of being able to provide him with SoulCare. Somehow now, as he tells me about his struggles, I am supposed to speak words back to him that actually provide care for this man's soul. What does that look like? What do I do? How do I think about the opportunity that this man presents me? Why is it—as I hear people talk to me, and this man is just a very clear example—why is it that so many people who share their struggles with me feel (and so many times in my own life, that I feel) that they've lost a sense of freedom? Why is there this sense that no longer can I move, no longer is my capacity to choose—the third of the four capacities we're talking about—why does the capacity to choose seem no longer to be present? Why do I not feel that I can choose? Of course I can choose to order a cup of coffee, or to have a Coke, or to order a sandwich, but when it comes to the really important things of life, how do I choose to deal with my interior world when my interior world is not the way I want it to be? This man was struggling with that.

The question I want to ask in this presentation is: How do I think as this man shares his journeying reality, his presenting problem, where he makes known to me that his capacity to choose no longer feels alive within him? "I'm stuck. I'm dry. I don't know what I can choose to do that will make a difference." It's a very common problem.

A man recently, another man, recently called me and said that—he used these words—he said, "My life is unraveling." There were significant health problems in his family, significant problems with children, significant problems with his ministry, and his response to me was, "I am afraid I am losing control. I feel like I am out of control. And Larry, I am frankly literally afraid, not that I am going to go punch somebody in the mouth or pull out a gun and shoot somebody, but I am afraid that I am going to do something that I don't want to do. I'm losing control." Why, if we have the capacity to choose, does that capacity seem to be so diminished?

A third woman, just to give you another quick example, said to me, “I find it impossible right now to give what is best to my husband. I’m hurt. He’s dealt with me in ways that have produced a pain within me, and I know that I am not giving him the best parts of me and at some level I want to, at some level I don’t want to. I want to punish this guy, but even when I am walking with the Lord more deeply and I want to give him who I am as a woman, a godly woman, I want to bless my husband, I don’t know how to do it, I can’t seem to find the strength to do it.”

The conversation that presents the opportunity for SoulCare is a conversation that must begin with the confidence that the Spirit of Christ is on the move. That the struggling person is journeying toward a vision; here’s a man who says, “I am thirsty and I don’t have any satisfaction for my thirst. I feel dry. I feel barren in my spiritual life.” Can I begin with the excitement of saying that right now, at this point in this man’s life, the Spirit of God is working, maybe invisibly, maybe I can’t see it, maybe he can’t see it, maybe we’ll not see the Spirit working for days, weeks, months, years, I don’t know, but the Spirit is working and present, and by faith do I believe that, so that the vision that I develop for this man’s life is one that I can have confidence the Spirit is moving toward—and maybe I get a chance as a SoulCarer to tag along behind the Spirit in whatever He is going to do, whatever He wants to do? Do I believe that the Spirit is moving this man who feels so spiritually empty toward becoming a whole person, toward a vision where he desires God more than anything else, where his appetite for God actually is stirred to the point where it is stronger than any other appetite, where he is deeply persuaded—as a person who has the capacity to perceive—where he is deeply persuaded that God can be trusted, that his desires are most strongly for God, and that there is a sense of freedom within his soul to move toward God, and to accept God’s movement toward him? Can I believe that the Spirit of God is moving this man toward meaningful spiritual maturity, toward real wholeness, with desires for God, with convictions about God, and with the freedom to move toward God?

That’s my vision, but obviously my next question, as I believe that’s happening is: “So, now what do I do?” Well as I have said to you before, I believe the very next thing that we need to do is to realize that we are going to get nowhere until we have the courage to look into this man’s interior world. That’s not just reserved for the psychologist. That’s not just reserved for the counseling office. That’s an opportunity that we as Christians need to capitalize on. And I rather think, if I can speak personally for a moment, that one of the deepest sources of my own loneliness is that so few people seem to have much of an interest in exploring my interior world and I wonder if I have much interest in exploring somebody else’s interior world unless I am on duty. I am a Christian who just longs to see what’s really happening in your life. So here’s a man who tells me, “I am struggling. I don’t have a sense of spiritual vitality in my life and I feel stuck. I feel like I am in quicksand, and don’t know how to climb out; there’s no foundation that I can put my foot on and push myself up. There’s no sense of volitionality left in my life whatsoever.”

And I have a vision for the man. Now I begin to look into his interior world and ask, “Well what’s going on?” I want to look below the water line. I want to look beneath visible reality that the person is experiencing on their journey into...what? As we start looking beneath the water line, as we start looking at the interior world, what are we looking for? Well, a person who wants to provide biblical SoulCare makes a huge assumption as they talk with this individual, with any other individual, and the assumption is this: The man you are speaking with bears the image of God. That means he has the capacity to relate well to God and to relate well to others. The

capacity is there. But the SoulCarer goes beyond believing in that capacity which reflects the image of God. The SoulCarer also knows something else that's true—that this image-bearer is fallen and, therefore, the capacity to relate well has been corrupted. That means that the capacity to desire, the first element in the image of God that we have discussed in previous sessions, is a capacity that has been corrupted into a self-oriented demand for satisfaction.

So when a man moves toward his wife, I can assume this gentleman who tells me he is dry spiritually...when I think about his relationship with his wife, I assume that his capacity to desire to give his wife the best that God has put within him has been corrupted into a self-oriented demand that his wife move toward him in a way that provides him with satisfaction. I just assume that that's what I am going to find when I look below the surface. If I am curious enough about the man, I am going to also look into his capacity to perceive and I am going to draw on stories of his relational encounters. I'm going to maybe hear him tell about when he was three years old and his father left the family, when he was ten and his schoolteacher embarrassed him in front of everybody, he was fifteen and a girl turned him down for a date in front of his friends, and when he was twenty-two and he got fired from his first job.

As I hear all these relational encounters, I am going to assume that this man's capacity to perceive, as he looks at life and draws conclusions, has not been properly used. That he's not moving through life believing, "Isn't God terrific? And at every moment I know that God is in the suffering." Rather, there is going to be something in him that I am going to be able to spot, maybe at some point, that will represent the fact that he's deceived by foolishness. The capacity to desire is corrupted into a demand for satisfaction. The capacity to perceive is corrupted into a deception by foolishness.

But I am also going to be looking now into his volitional capacity. And as I start exploring, and ask questions, and have a wisdom road map that guides me into thinking about this man's life, I am going to find out that something has gone wrong with his capacity to choose. Rather than him experiencing the vitality of freedom, the exhilarating reality of "I'm a free man; I can choose to abandon myself to God; I can choose to sit in His presence and just receive all the water He wants to pour into my thirsty soul. I can choose to move toward my wife to bless her. I can choose to handle the conflict in my family with God-reflecting strength. I can choose all that"—that somehow that capacity to choose has been corrupted into now the reality he feels is not the thrill of choice, but the loss of freedom. My question is: Why?

Why do I feel that my sense of freedom is lost? Why, when I determine to go on a diet, does my sense of freedom seem to flee rather rapidly in the presence of the menu? Where is my capacity to choose to glorify God in the way I eat; to glorify God in the way I talk to my wife on the telephone when she calls from a trip? Where's my capacity to choose to enjoy the exhilarating freedom of being all that God has called me to be? What's happened to it? That's our question. I want to explore that with you now for a few minutes.

The capacity to choose corrupted into the loss of freedom. To understand that, to understand what is happening with our capacity to choose, begin with this: Your capacity to choose, my capacity to choose as bearers of a relational God's image, has two parts to it. There are two things that I can choose as a human being, two things I have been designed to be able to choose.

The first thing I can choose is a goal. I can choose an objective. If I believe that my desires will be satisfied by this particular direction, then that direction becomes my goal. If I've been feeling wonderful in my memory about a time when someone applauded me for performing well, then perhaps my goal is to get this same recognition as an adult. I can choose a goal; that's the first thing I can choose. I can choose the direction my life is going to head.

And the second thing I can choose is a strategy. Here I am in the mall; you are here. I've found out where I am. The mall is huge, many corridors, many stores, many hallways, and I am here, and I decide what I want to do is to go to the ice cream shop. That's my goal. My strategy, according to the roadmap which the directory reveals, is to go down this way about ten stores and make a left at the J.C. Penney, and then go right a little while longer, and there's the ice cream store. I can choose a strategy that, in my understanding of things, is going to reach a goal.

Now I want you to consider what a fallen image-bearer does—a fallen image-bearer who has the capacity to choose both a goal and a strategy for reaching the goal. Consider what people do, and really this is all of us—this is me, and this is you, and this is my friend who feels spiritually dry. Consider what people do who are not fully in touch with their appetite for God. Consider what people do who are aware of desires that fall short of their deepest desire. Recall we spoke about desires of necessity; the deepest desire of my heart is for God, because I bear his image and I'm a dependent being who draws his life from God; therefore, my deepest desire is for God, just as the deepest desire of a fish is for water. Suppose I am out of touch with that.

Suppose I am aware only of my desires of importance. Suppose I am aware only of desires that matter, but are not absolutely core—a desire to have my husband respond to me, my wife respond to me, my friends want to spend time with me, a certain job, a certain impact. Suppose I am aware only of my desires of importance and not the desires of necessity; then, what happens at that point is that the desires of importance, if they are what I am most in touch with, and if I am out of touch with the deepest desire for God, then those desires that are important begin to feel essential. And what is truly a desire of necessity is ignored and a desire that is important becomes the central ruling passion of my life. I begin treating it as though it were a desire of necessity. If I perceive life foolishly and I am out of touch with my deepest passions, then that's what's going to happen, and I am going to start pursuing goals that are not essential, but I am going to mistakenly believe that they are.

Now, let me sketch that very, very simply for you. Let's go back to our image of the mall. Let's assume that here's where this gentleman is: He's feeling spiritually dry. He's not feeling alive. He's not feeling vital, and somewhere down deep inside of him, if I have the discernment to recognize it, I may be able to discern that he is moving toward a goal that really is not a fundamental goal but he thinks it is. This goal is then going to seem to him as a matter of life and death. It's not going to feel like a choice, it's going to feel like an imposed requirement. And then he's going to figure out a strategy as a volitional being, a strategy, which he believes, is going to be able to reach the goal that he assumes is necessary.

My friend who felt stuck in his spiritual walk, who didn't know what it meant to exercise freedom in his relationship with God, or with others for that matter, told me the story of his background a little bit. He said that when he was eleven years old, his father had abandoned him; his father

left the family and he really hadn't ever seen his father or heard from him since the time when he was eleven years old. As he has heard the story told by his mother and pieced together a few things, apparently what happened is during the time when this boy was eleven years old and this man was an eleven-year-old boy, his father went into some significant financial reverse and felt very threatened by it, felt like a failure, and just didn't want to face how weak a man he was by assuming the burden of responsibility for his wife and children, so he just took off. He just left the family.

Now I want you to go inside that eleven-year-old boy's interior world. This is my client now, if you will, the friend of mine with whom I'm wanting to do SoulCare and he tells me, "I am spiritually dry, and don't know what to do about it." That's what he says to me. I want to provide SoulCare. I start thinking about his interior world. I hear him tell his stories and I think about him as an image-bearer who has the capacity to choose. And I think, "What would have happened to this boy when he was eleven years old and he went through that kind of pain?" That's real pain. That wasn't the design that God had for that boy. That boy was designed to be loved by his dad and to have a strong father enter his life and believe in him for as long as that father lived. The father failed. He moved away. I would suggest that, among a lot of other things that we could think about, that a deep conviction this image-bearing boy with the capacity to perceive is going to form—a deep conviction. A deep conviction that might be expressed this way: "Trusting anybody is risky business. If I were to give myself to Dad for the first eleven years—Dad was a swell guy; we played catch in the backyard; he came to my ball game; he tucked me in at night; he was a nice man. I love my daddy, and I gave myself to him, but I've learned that when you give yourself to people, when you risk real involvement, the result is pain. I think what I want to do is develop a goal to never feel like that again. I'm in the mall and I want a better life than I've experienced with my father. I don't want the kind of pain I felt from my dad. What's my strategy? I can choose a strategy that reaches the chosen goal that makes sense to me as I perceive my world, as I enter my world with deep desires for certain things to be given to me."

As this man's story unfolds, he told me that after his father left—and of course he grieved, a very hard time for the family—but he discovered that after a couple of years with his father having been gone (and apparently never to return, which is what happened), that he became very competent in school. He became very able to do well and in eighth grade, he told a story—and as an adult he told the story with tears—in eighth grade he performed particularly well for a certain schoolteacher, a male schoolteacher about the age of his father, and the father figure, the schoolteacher, moved toward the boy with profound recognition. He felt great. Now this boy's foolishness is taking shape. Now he has a clear idea what he's after: A better life to him is achievement without risk. "And in order to achieve certain things, I have discovered that I have resources to think well, to perform well in certain academic fields," and his strategy then includes sharing little of his heart with anybody, but performing very, very well.

I want you to catch a very important point. When someone is pursuing a lesser desire, none of us would be critical of this young man for wanting to perform in a way that somebody applauded. That's not an unholy desire. But when that desire of importance becomes the central, ruling desire of his life, that boy's an idolater. And that boy is moving toward something that he perceives as his deepest desire, and he feels like this desire to perform and to get recognition is something which has to happen; it becomes a desire of necessity in his perception, and whatever

he does feels essential, and his sense of freedom is lost. He becomes a slave to what he perceives must be and he becomes a slave to whatever strategy he perceives has the chance of reaching his goal. The man is now a slave. He has lost his sense of freedom.

You and I have the capacity to choose, but if in our foolishness we wrongly understand what our deepest desires are and pursue a lesser desire as our central desire, we will lose a thrill of being free—our capacity to choose.

I want to spend just a few minutes in talking about the fourth capacity of an image-bearer. You and I not only have the capacity to desire, the capacity to perceive, the capacity to choose, but we also have the capacity to feel. We have the capacity to experience emotions to feel happy and glad and worried and scared and all the thousands of emotions with all their nuances that we experience every day. We have the capacity to feel, and that really is what makes life rich and God's intention in giving us the capacity to feel was to bless us, but for many of us, that capacity has turned into a curse. Because the capacity to feel has been corrupted into what I like to call a requirement that we no longer face our dependency. Our capacity to feel has been corrupted into a denial of our dependency. Let me explain what I mean.

If you and I are healthy people, if we're whole people, pursuing God with the deepest desires of our heart and perceiving His goodness and moving toward glorifying Him, and finding strategies that God has equipped us to employ to please Him and to glorify Him and to reveal Him, then we're going to feel certain things. A lot of things, but central to what we're going to feel, if we're healthy human beings with the capacity to feel—in our dependency on Him we are going to feel a certain groaning. We're going to feel an incredible desire to be out of this world and into heaven because this is not our natural environment. This is not what we are designed to be. We are designed to be in a perfect community; we never have that down here. We're going to experience a certain sadness, a certain groaning. We're also going to experience a deep hope; we're going to experience an anchor in the middle of all of life that's hard and say that, "Yeah, we're groaning here but we know what's coming. The best is yet to come. There'll be groaning, but there'll be hope. There'll be a joy, not without sorrow and struggle, but there'll be a joy that says in the middle of this world, 'I really am free to worship God and to serve others and that's what I was designed to do and in doing so I really do experience a deep level of joy.'"

That's what a healthy person feels, but what do you and I feel, because we're not very healthy? Well, if we demand a better life, and as volitional beings we choose the goal of achievement without risk, or controlling other people so they can't hurt us, whatever goal we choose, and then we strategize to reach the goal that we think our life depends on. When we choose a wrong goal, one of three things can happen.

Our wrong goal might be experienced by us as uncertain. This man goes in to his family—the man who was abandoned by his dad, who's looking for the better life of achievement and getting recognition without being intimate—and he's not real sure how this is going to work. Is his wife going to applaud his business success without his being involved very often? Is he going to be able to achieve certain things, and get the recognition that he desires? Is his goal guaranteed, or is his goal a little bit uncertain? And if his goal is uncertain, there's going to be a basic anxiety. Uncertain goals produce anxiety. Will it happen? I don't know. I can't make it happen and I can't

count on God to make it happen. There really is profound uncertainty and I am scared. Uncertain goals, anxiety.

What actually happened in this marriage, of course, as you could easily predict, is as he moved into his marriage and worked too many hours and made lots of money—and his wife was thrilled with the money for a while—but after a while, she responded by saying, “You know, I wouldn’t mind having a little more of you.” And rather than getting the recognition and applause that he wanted, his wife blocked his goals. What happens when your goal, a goal upon which you believe your life depends, is blocked? He got mad. Blocked goals lead to anger.

There’s a third kind of goal that sometimes develops in our lives, and we have a wrong goal other than glorifying God, when our goal is something other on which we believe our life depends, and the goal becomes one that is unreachable. We just can’t seem to do enough to make it happen. We try to be the best parent we can be, and our kids still don’t turn out right. We try to be the best husband we know how to be and our wives don’t respond. The best Christian we know how to be and God doesn’t come through and give us an encounter of His presence and we have an unreachable goal. We end up with self-hatred. Uncertain goals, anxiety; blocked goal, anger; unreachable goals, self-hatred.

Folks, you and I have a marvelous capacity—each of us does—to pretend that we don’t feel as bad as we do. Each of us has the unique capacity to hide our feelings beneath business, television, movies, sexual pleasure—all sorts of things that help us pretend that we’re not dependent on God for life. We’re moving in wrong directions but we don’t have to pay the emotional consequences because we can pretend the consequences really aren’t there. We’re image-bearers with the capacity to choose and a capacity to feel. We’re image-bearers with the capacity to desire and a capacity to perceive. God has given us all the capacities that we need to relate. We’ve squandered the opportunity. What does that look like? What can the SoulCarer do with image-bearers who squander the opportunity God has given us to relate? We’ll look at that in the next presentation.

Discussion Questions

As volitional beings, we are free to choose both the goals we pursue and the behaviors that pursue those goals. Reflect on the distinction between chosen goals and chosen behaviors.

Discuss (from personal experience, if possible) how the loss of freedom is related to the pursuit of hidden goals.

Describe how the goals we choose are related to the emotions we feel. Offer personal illustrations.

Lesson 9 Study Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

The Corrupted Image:
We're Hopeless and Helpless

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

The first reformation restored the doctrine of the Trinity to its preeminent place in theology. The second reformation, under Luther and Calvin, restored the doctrine of justification by free grace to its vital place in our understanding of salvation. In this lesson, Dr. Crabb explains the need for the yet-to-come “third reformation,” the explosion of SoulCare in Christian community, which depends so radically on the work of the Holy Spirit.

When you complete this lesson, “The Corrupted Image: We’re Hopeless and Helpless,” you should be able to:

- Understand why the effectiveness of SoulCare in Christian community depends so radically on the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Accept the vital role of curiosity in SoulCare.
- Discuss ways in which curiosity about what is really going on in another’s life will hinge upon all that you have learned so far about SoulCare.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Nine: The Corrupted Image: We're Hopeless and Helpless

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

I began this series of lectures with an observation that every day, millions of people have conversations. Every day one person talks with another person, and words are exchanged. What happens? How often do you suppose SoulCare takes place in the millions of conversations that take place every day all across the world? If the conversations that I hear, and sometimes contribute to, are any indication, then I would suggest that there are very few conversations happening today, right now in the world, where the Spirit of God supernaturally moves through one person and out of them into another where the other person is invigorated in his appetite for God. I believe that's rare. Now what I want to see is that become common. That's the revolution I have in mind.

Wouldn't it be something if the well-meaning Christian friends, the pastors, the counselors, the therapists, the friends who have lunch with each other, wouldn't it be something if there was a sincere desire to move into the other person's life that went beyond the sincere desire—because many have that—but that sincere desire were buttressed by a passion that's supernatural, actually released out of one person's soul, carried along according to a wisdom that comes directly from the Scriptures, and is illumined by the Spirit so that two souls actually connect? So the chairs are turned toward one another. And something happens that's miraculous and supernatural; could that actually be? Is that a pipe dream? Or is that a possibility? Is that what God intends for us to do? Is that what He meant when He said in Hebrews 10, in verse 24...? I want you to spend time thinking about—give ongoing close attention to the possibility—that when you assemble yourselves together (and for goodness' sakes, do that), don't stop conversing, don't stop talking with each other, but when you do have these conversations, think really hard about how a miracle can take place. Think really hard about how the miracle of supernatural SoulCare can occur. That's what this series is all about.

I believe that the third reformation—the revolution that will build on the doctrine of the Trinity, captured by the first reformation, I believe that the revolution that will build on the doctrine of justification established in the second reformation—is a reformation that will move through the church, a reformation dealing with the doctrine of sanctification, that will move through the church in one-on-one conversations. In small groups, where people begin to experience a kind of relation that they're able to say, "This requires the Spirit." A kind of conversation, a kind of exchange where we say, "If the Gospel were not true, this could never have happened." Where somebody else observes this conversation and says, "That can't take place unless Jesus is who He claimed to be." And then the world begins to watch Christians relate and the Gospel begins to have power. It all begins with the reformation that I want to see happen, that I'm begging the Spirit of God to produce in our culture, in our communities, in our worlds—the reformation dealing with the doctrine of sanctification that you and I can change, and can change deeply,

but that deep change is a work of the Spirit; it's not a work of human effort; it's not the result of human wisdom; it's the result of the work of the Spirit, the deep work of the Spirit prompted by how Christians relate.

I really am troubled by my own relational style. I am troubled by what I see happen in churches. We get out of our cars, we walk in the front door, we get our brochure for the day or little program, and we sit down, and we sing the songs, and we are led in worship and we hear a talk, and we take a few notes, perhaps, we plunk a buck in the collection plate, and we go home. Have we ever related? In the Sunday morning service, of course the intention is to relate to God and worship, and that does happen of course many times in many good churches, but does the overflow of worship to God result in a connection of saints with each other? Why does that not happen as much as it could?

If we're going to see the revolution take place that I believe the Spirit longs for, if we're going to build on the doctrine of the Trinity, which says relationships are central, if we're going to build on the doctrine of justification, which says that life with God is a gift, and if we're now going to capture the doctrine of sanctification, which says that that gift of life can be lived out in worship to God and in each other, if we're going to develop a revolution of community, the revolution of SoulCare, it's going to begin with something that sounds very simple when I say it but is as absent from the church as anything I know. It's going to begin with curiosity.

It's going to begin with the curiosity so that when you and I get together for a cup of coffee, when you see me in the church foyer and we have two minutes to chat and we can't do much of anything, there still is a Spirit within me, within you, as we meet each other, of curiosity. Not intrusion, not "tell me all your secrets; we have two minutes," not that at all, but a profound sense of, "I am in the presence of an image-bearer. I am in the presence of somebody in whom the Spirit of God is working. I am in the presence of somebody who has been subject to the flesh and the world and the Devil, and their life has become a mess. I am in the presence of somebody in whom the Spirit is working, not to improve the mess, but to replace the mess with a whole new way to live. I am in the presence of something phenomenal. And, my goodness, am I privileged. And I would love to understand more about who you are, and have you understand more about who I am."

What's really going on inside of me? Do you know? What's really going on inside of you? Do I know? Do I care? Am I interested? SoulCare begins centrally with a value, a virtue, the spiritual fruit of curiosity. What do I want the most in my life that I am really chasing after? Why am I teaching this course? Why do I do what I do? Why do I write books? Why do I meet friends for coffee and talk about their lives? What am I really after? To exhibit the fact that I like to talk in certain ways and like to have people say, "Gee, that was a good thought"? What are my desires? I have the capacity to desire; what am I desiring? Anybody curious about that? Am I curious about what you're desiring? I notice how hard you work. I notice that you get up at six in the morning and you're at work by six-thirty and you're home by seven-thirty or eight. And I wonder what are you chasing after? What is really happening? Am I curious about that? That's the first thing to be curious about. We all have the capacity to desire.

Am I curious about what each of us believes about life? What do we really think life is all about? And when you sit down at the end of the month, or the first of the month, to pay your bills and

realize that you owe twice what you made and something inside of you gets very angry at life, what does that tell me that you believe life is all about? Life is all about a better life where money exceeds the expenses? Life is all about the arthritis going away? Life is all about your kid wanting to go to church? What's life all about? What do you believe? How do you perceive? What have you been taught by life? Am I curious about that? Are you curious about what I believe? Am I curious about how you have exercised your capacity to perceive life? Is there curiosity?

What goal are you running after? You're in the mall, you're here, and I watch you live and you're going there. Where are you heading? How do you think you're going to get there? What are your strategies? What are you moving toward? What really matters to you that has become your necessity—that you're saying, "If I get nothing else, I must get this"? What guiding fiction, because we're foolish, are we revolving our lives around? What guiding understanding, what guiding perception has led us to say, "This is what we're after and whatever else I don't get, I guarantee I am going to get this"? And, "The one thing that I don't want to ever happen is what"? Do I know that about you? Do I know the battle you're fighting in your soul? Do I know the struggle that you have between the flesh and the Spirit, because your flesh wants to move in this direction and the Spirit is guiding you another, and you're being torn in two directions. Do I understand that? Do I care? Am I curious?

Do we set aside the kind of time where I can explore that in your life? Where you can explore that in my life? Is that what happens in your small group? Or you're satisfied with your small group because you have gotten a good principle out of the book of Galatians, which doesn't touch your soul, but at least feels accurate? Are you happy with your small group because you've had a good time, and it has been pleasant, and you caught up on each other's lives, and it has been interesting, and the coffee was hot enough, and the refreshments were decent tonight, and it has been a nice way to kill an evening? And tomorrow night you're going to watch a ball game and it's not going to be a whole lot more important or less important, another way to kill an evening?

Or, could something explosive happen when small groups get together because we're curious about our capacity to desire, our capacity to perceive, our capacity to choose, and am I curious about how you feel? Am I curious about the fact that, you know, your wife is gone for three days, and she told you the day before she was going, that she had a ticket and she was visiting your mother, and you didn't even know about it? And you say, "That's okay; I'm a patient guy." Is that what you really feel? Perhaps you're a little hacked off. Well, Christians shouldn't be "hacked off"; that's kind of a bad word. You love your wife. Well, wait a minute, do you really? What is happening inside of you? Am I curious about that? Not because I want to judge you and say, "Well, you shouldn't feel so angry." I know you are, but more, are you really kind of angry? Are you really kind of worried? How do you feel about the stock market going up and down? How do you feel about your ministry not working so well? How does the pastor feel when he loses a couple hundred members in his church? What really happens inside of him? Am I curious about that?

Most of us manage to engage in many conversations without ever being curious. Most of us manage to engage in many conversations to exchange many words without ever turning our chairs. A woman recently wrote to me and said this, and this is not quite verbatim; I don't have her letter, but it's close to exactly what she said, very close: "I've been in a small group for five years. We've met weekly for that long and I don't feel like anybody knows me a bit better now

than when the group began. And I don't feel like I know anybody else in the group meaningfully better than when the group began. Oh, we know things about each other. I know the names of their kids and I know where they went on vacation, and I know that they had a pretty hard week last week when his mother had surgery. Yeah, I know about that. We prayed for them, but in terms of what's happening in the core of their being where they bear the image of God, where they treasure certain things because they have a capacity to desire, where they believe certain things about the nature of life because they have the capacity to perceive, where they're moving in certain directions that they demand have to happen because they have the capacity to choose, where they feel certain things, but they're afraid to feel them—do I know anybody at that level more than I did before?”

May I suggest to you that the hallmark of SoulCare is curiosity? Not intrusiveness. Not, “I want to know all your secrets and you better tell me.” But the hallmark of SoulCare comes out of the fact the you and I, as worshipers of God, followers of Jesus, realize that a larger story is being told beyond the story that we can see. That God has a plan before the foundation of time that He's going to take individual people, people that He created for His glory to enjoy the kind of relationship the Trinity has been enjoying for ever and ever and ever. And He's going to work in their lives to bring them into the kind of relationship which will produce deep joy. How's He doing that? What's the obstacle? Who are the enemies? How does He overcome them? How is He overcoming them now in this person's life?

When you get the big picture, you begin to get very curious, and now meetings with people are not just chances to shoot the breeze. Don't misunderstand me; I think shooting the breeze is fine; I think watching ballgames on television is okay; but, is there not a curiosity that when the opportunity arises, the curiosity just comes out, maybe quietly, respectfully, not angrily or aggressively, but meaningfully? Is there a respectful curiosity that celebrates God's handiwork? Is there a respectful curiosity that envisions the Spirit's movement? Is there a respectful curiosity that discerns the real battle you're fighting in the depths of your soul? Is there a respectful curiosity that longs to touch your soul in a way that strengthens you for another day of spiritual battle?

Curiosity is so often limited to the professional counselor's office; I think that's a tragedy. In our culture, that's the safe place; that's where we open up; that's where we talk about real stuff—church, we talk about Bible stories and worship—but the real stuff, what's happening in my soul, that's talked about in the privacy of their professional's office. Praise God for those professional offices where good things happen, but couldn't it happen in the church? Couldn't it happen in the community of believers? Why are we so uncurious? Why do we keep our distance from each other? Are we afraid of discovering things that we can't handle? Are we afraid of discovering things that make us feel inadequate?

The revolution that I envision recognizes that curiosity belongs in the church. That curiosity belongs in a community of people where love provides safety, where hope provides stability, where prayer provides support, and where teaching provides direction. If those resources are in the body of Christ, then curiosity becomes an opportunity, not something to be avoided or something to be feared. Curiosity—believe this, because it's true—curiosity will never discover anything that grace cannot handle. Curiosity will discover something that only grace can handle, so when you get to

know somebody well, you will end up dependent, or more aware of your dependency, and that's going to release the supernatural power, and that's going to produce meaningful SoulCare.

Now I want you to back up with me and I want you to see how what we've learned in this course, as we've been talking about "we bear the image of God and we have capacities to relate," I want to help you see how what we're learning in this particular course so far, can guide our curiosity and actually arouse our curiosity toward each other. I want people to connect. SoulCare requires connection. The hallmark of SoulCare is curiosity. And I want us to see that curiosity is the beginning, not the ending; SoulCare starts with curiosity, but it doesn't stop with curiosity, and I want you to realize that curiosity, true curiosity, to really explore somebody else's soul, to get to know somebody, will take you into deep water that's over our heads. And we'll discover how inadequate we are to do anything with what we find. And we'll discover how dependent we are on the Spirit, for SoulCare to happen.

Now, a friend shares with you some part of his or her journey; as I indicated before, I prefer the term "journeying reality" to "presenting problem" because the phrase "presenting problem" has the connotation of "here's something to fix; here's a problem; we'll solve it," as opposed to "here's a part of my journey; I'll join you on the journey and get to know you and see if I can't be God's instrument in releasing the Spirit of Christ more powerfully as you continue your journey toward a vision." I like the phrase "journeying reality" a little bit better than "presenting problem." And as the person shares a journeying reality, you discover that you want to engage in a spiritual conversation. You don't want to just shoot the breeze. You don't want to just give advice and exhortation and just give them a hug and have a word of prayer, not bad things to do, but you want to connect at deeper levels than maybe you've known before—the level that you'd like to be connected with.

And so when the person shares their journeying reality, you attend first of all, before you say a word, you attend to your own interior world. You ask the question, "What's happening in me? I'm an image-bearer with the capacities to relate. I desire certain things. I perceive in certain ways. I choose certain goals. I strategize to reach those goals, and I feel a variety of emotions. So I'm a person who bears the image of God and here's my friend sharing a journeying reality." And I begin to tune into my interior world, not to become narcissistic or obsessive, but to see, "Am I really in a position where I am walking with the Spirit and I can be powerful in this person's life?" And so, you begin to ask yourself a question as you begin the conversation of SoulCare, just to yourself, and in an attitude before God, you ask yourself, "Am I feeling anxious? Am I nervous as this person shares this? Am I feeling a little ticked off?—I thought this person would be out of this problem by now; my goodness, they've been saved for twenty years and they're still fussing with this? Am I angry and judgmental? Am I feeling a pressure to meet this person's expectations?—they think I have something to offer and I feel like a dolt; I don't know what I have to offer? What am I feeling, what's happening inside of me?"

So what you do as you begin the conversation of SoulCare is, you face what you're feeling and you embrace the profound sense of inadequacy. And something inside of you says, "Oh God, have mercy on them. Give them a chance to talk to somebody else." But then you say, "Now, wait a minute. I am inadequate, but Christ is in me, so you know what? I am really not inadequate. I have a power within me that could touch this person's life. And rather than wallowing in my

inadequacy, I can embrace the reality of my inadequacy, but then discover a confidence in the Spirit of God to work.” So you present yourself to God, with whoever you are, to find grace to help in your time of need, as you long to have a conversation and meaningful SoulCare with this person. Then you tune into what the Spirit might be up to in this person’s life. You begin to think vision. As this person shares with you their struggle, you ask, “Does this man strike me as weak? By the way he’s talking, I would think his wife would have a hard time relaxing in his strength.” And rather than getting mad at him for it, you say, “I know what the Spirit wants to do. He wants to make this guy strong.” Why, wouldn’t that be something? Why, that would change his family; that would bring glory to God.

Is this fellow struggling with pornography? Boy, you feel a resignation and you say, “Well, I have some temptations there too and I don’t know how to help him overcome that.” But rather than thinking like that, you think vision, and you say, “God wants this man to move toward purity. Wouldn’t that glorify God, to have a man fussing with pornography actually becoming a man of moral purity? Could that actually happen?” You get a vision.

Is this man full of guilt because his son is not living particularly well? God wants to give this man rest. You begin getting a vision.

You’re talking with a woman and she seems to you very stiff and guarded, and you feel like, here’s a woman that you could never get close to, and you start saying to yourself, “Boy, she’s been hurt in a variety of ways and she’s stubbornly committed to keeping her life and her soul safe. What’s God up to? He wants to make her a tender woman who gives all the beauty within her soul.” You begin to think vision. Then you start getting really curious.

You’ve faced your inadequacy; you’re thinking vision, and then curiosity. Where’s this person right now? Where are they headed? You see, curiosity centers around those two central questions. Where is this person right now? You long to know, you long to explore where this person’s life is right now, not just the exterior world of their circumstances, but their interior world in their soul. You want to know that. The second question you want to know is: Where’s this person wanting to move? Here they are. In this particular spot in their lives—you are here. Where? Well, you’re struggling with this particular journeying reality. You feel certain struggles within you. You’re hurting about some things and your marriage isn’t going well, and you’re worried about some bills that are coming up, and you’re feeling inadequate inside. This is where you are, and you’re saying to yourself, “I really want a better life.” You get very curious about how this person is perceiving. Where’s the treasure of their heart? What do they really want? What do they believe is going to bring them satisfaction? What is their strategy? You become very curious about all these things and you begin asking questions that are designed to help you uncover where the person is and where the person is heading.

Do those questions interest you? Are you intrigued by that? If not, then may I gently suggest that you are unaware of your own soul. You probably have the conviction that you can make it through life without ever looking beneath the surface, that if you can just solve a few surface problems and get enough money in the bank account and get your relationships feeling pretty good, that you’ll just be fine. And, if you weren’t intrigued by these kinds of questions, you’ll never provide SoulCare. As a matter of fact, if you are not intrigued by these kinds of questions, my fear for

you is that your efforts to relate to others will be subject to the same indictment that God gave in Jeremiah 6 when He said, “You have healed the wound of God’s people superficially because you didn’t take the wound seriously.” You didn’t know how deep the problem was.

But these questions perhaps intrigue you. I hope they do; they intrigue me. And now, with these lectures in your mind and this particular course, you’re looking at this person’s life and you’re saying, “Well, what really is the story of this person’s soul? What is the story of their soul? And what is the story of their soul without the Spirit? Without the Spirit working, what is really happening in their soul?” And you begin to be very curious about that. You know they bear the image of God, you know they’re fallen people, and you begin to think about their capacities to relate and how they’re living the story of their life, and you know they have the capacity to desire, and you’re wondering, “Where do they think that something is more necessary than God? Why did that man not talk to his wife about the conflicts in their marriage? Is he thinking that no conflict is more important than worship? Is he thinking that if he keeps things pleasant, that that’s the best he can hope for in his life? That’s his better life—is that what he’s after? Is he demanding the satisfaction of not hurting so much?”

You’re concerned about this; you’re curious. His capacity to perceive life—where is this man foolish? Where is he pursuing a goal that makes no sense as a person with the capacity to choose? Where does his foolishness lead to ridiculous goals—to goals that will disappoint and frustrate him every time? How are his capacities being exercised in ways that move him toward a better life? I wonder what he is feeling as he is living his life. You’re asking these questions. You’re curious about these things.

Can you see what we’ve come to? We’ve come to a rather difficult place, actually. We’ve come to the point of somebody’s sharing a journeying reality; you’re feeling a profound curiosity; you’re believing in a vision as to what God could do; you’re listening to them as they tell their relational story; and as they tell the story, you’re discerning the deepest story of the deep story of their soul: what’s happening in their soul without the Spirit—their flesh dynamics, their root problem? And as you listen to them tell their story, and as you are curious about what’s happening and you realize the corruption of their relational capacities, something dawns on you. On the basis of all that’s happening in here, on the basis of all that you’ve heard so far, there can be no movement towards the vision. And something in you says, “I’m licked.”

Is SoulCare nothing more than exposing a bad story? Is SoulCare nothing more than helping people realize what a mess they are? Is SoulCare nothing more than being curious enough to discover that, in the core of their being, things are really, really awful—that all their image-bearing capacities have been corrupted by the flesh, by the world, by the Devil? What do we do? I don’t believe we’ll see the sun rise until we enter the dark night. What we’ve done so far is talk about the dark night, talk about the fact that life just isn’t working. God has done something. What has He done? It’s the basis for providing SoulCare. We’ll take a look at that in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

What keeps you from being a more curious person? (Note: No one is curious enough, and no one is *wisely* curious enough.)

Reflect on the sentence: Curiosity will never uncover what grace cannot handle. Discuss how believing that sentence could free you to become a more curious person.

What would it mean if all Christians were wisely curious about one another? What difference would this make?

Lesson 10 Study Guide

CC202

***SoulCare Foundations II:
Understanding People
and Problems***

Don't Bless the Mess:
We Need Something More

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb explains how the capacities to desire, think, choose, and feel have all been severely corrupted. He also envisions the story of someone who uses his or her capacities as an image-bearer to fulfill the purposes of God.

When you complete this lesson, “Don’t Bless the Mess: We Need Something More,” you should be able to:

- Understand that Christianity is not centrally about providing a *better life*; it is about providing a *better hope*.
- See that the four capacities of image-bearing people have been hopelessly corrupted.
- Realize that to know God for His glory is the source of true meaning and joy forever.
- Envision what could be the story of someone who uses his/her capacities as an image-bearer to fulfill the purposes of God.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations II: Understanding People and Problems

Lesson Ten: Don't Bless the Mess: We Need Something More

Your teacher for this course is noted psychologist, author, and speaker, Dr. Larry Crabb.

Almost everybody I know is trying to find a way to experience a better life. Some try to find a better life through material possessions—if I can get rich and buy the BMW, if I can get rich and buy the new home, if I can do whatever will bring me pleasure materially, then I will have a better life. Others are looking for principles—people crowd into Christian bookstores every day looking for the book title that says, “Here are the steps to whatever is the better life. You want better kids? Here’s the book to read; you’ll have better kids. You want better ministry? You want to feel better about yourself? Here’s the way to make it happen.” We’re all looking for a better life. Some turn to Christianity to find a better life.

But let me tell you, Christianity is not centrally about experiencing a better life. Christianity is centrally about experiencing a better hope. Let me explain what I mean. Return with me to the image of the mall that we’ve been talking about, and remember the very obvious point we made that people enter a mall, and they look to see where they are; they’ve discovered the red dot in the middle of the directory that says “You are here” and then they decide where they want to go. They want to go to the store that will give them what they want.

What most of us are after is a better life. And then we come up with strategies to pursue this better life. We turn to God. We turn to the Bible. We turn to friends. We turn to counselors. We turn to all sorts of resources to come up with a plan that will lead us to the better life that we believe is maturity, that we believe is happiness, that we believe is what God promised.

But I want to suggest to you that the real problem is not where we are; it’s where we are heading. Where we are is just a fact. We’re in the middle of a divorce. We’re in the middle of struggles with pornography. We’re in the middle of depression. We’re in the middle of a happy season where money is great and family life is super. Wherever we are is where we are; that’s just a fact. But the real question is this: Where are we heading? The greatest mistake that many of us make is to believe that Christianity promises a better life here and gives us techniques for reaching it. But I want to suggest to you, and I want to give you a verse to prove my point, Christianity is all about a better hope. What does that mean? And what are the implications of that teaching for our efforts to provide effective SoulCare?

There’s a verse in Hebrews 7—verse 19 says that God has provided us a better hope by which we... what? Get the better life we want? God has provided us a better hope by which we have our kids turn out as we desire? God has provided us a better hope by which we make enough money to go on the vacation as a family so we can have good family memories and get our video cameras out and look at them over pizza and popcorn a week later? What’s the better hope that God has promised? The verse goes on to say this: “God has provided us a better hope by which we draw

near to Him.” In other words, God has not promised to bless the mess of our lives. He has not promised to improve this mess so things really get better and we have the better life that all of us seem to think we’re supposed to have. What God has promised is that in the middle of the mess, He may change it—the cancer might be cured, the divorce might not take place, the kids might turn out to be godly, wonderful kids—and when that happens, celebrate the blessings, but that isn’t the center of Christianity. The center of Christianity is this: that God has provided us a better hope by which we can draw near to Him no matter what’s happening in our lives.

What are the implications of this for SoulCare? As we’ve been thinking about people, and trying to understand who we are as image-bearers of a relational God, as people with capacities to desire certain things, we can want—we can want God, we can want a new car, we can want intimacy with Jesus, we can want godly kids; we can want. We have a capacity to desire. We have a capacity to perceive. We have a capacity to choose and a capacity to feel. Now, with all these capacities that are there within us as image-bearers, they’ve all been corrupted. Something’s gone wrong with this and I want us to know, as we get into this understanding of people and their problems, I want us to understand what we’re really up against. Your curiosity as a SoulCarer, as you get into the core of people’s lives, will help you realize that in the core of most people’s lives, they’ve taken their capacities to relate to God in worship and to others in service, and those capacities have been corrupted to where they now are employed in the service of gaining a better life through any means that makes sense, and that’s what they’re after. What I am suggesting to you, and what I hope you’re seeing as we come to the end of this second course of SoulCare—that things really are a mess. That’s the story of a soul without Christ. The story of a soul without the Spirit’s intervention is a very bad story. It’s a very sad story, and frankly, it’s a hopeless story. It’s a helpless story. We’re hopeless. We can never achieve the deepest desires of our heart that God has planted within us; we can never achieve the deepest goals that we really believe if we see what’s true, if we long to experience, we can never feel the way we long to feel on our own. It just isn’t possible. It’s a hopeless effort to try to get all that we were built to enjoy. We can’t do it. We’re hopeless. We’re helpless.

I hope you are beginning to see how absolutely useless it is to prepare yourself to care for somebody else’s soul by learning techniques. I hope you are coming to see that there is just no point at all to spending your energy in becoming a provider in learning empathy skills. Or even in learning how to apply biblical principles of behavior to a particular problem. Somebody shares that their relationship with their child is difficult, and so right away you think of biblical principles and biblical teaching on parenting, and you try to apply the biblical principle on parenting to this particular parent’s life, and if they do this principle, they will have a better life. You can use God’s principles to get what you want—that’s not the better hope that’s been introduced. We learn empathy skills; we learn how to apply biblical principles; we affirm people and tell them we believe in them and encourage them, which are good things to do, but so often the things that we do that we call SoulCare are really an effort to help people strategize and be more effective in reaching the better life that God has never promised.

If we’re going to become true carers of SoulCare, if we are going to become true carers of the soul, if we’re going to move into people’s lives effectively and enter the battle for people’s souls, then we’re going to have to go way beyond the techniques of empathy, way beyond exhortation and accountability, way beyond biblical principles, and we’re going to have to take into account

something that is actually very discouraging to take into account. We're going to have to take into account the fact that the story of the soul without the Spirit is really, really terrible. When we face that the story of the soul without the Spirit leaves us hopeless and helpless, then we'll be delivered from the temptation to bless the mess, and we'll recognize that we need something more. There's going to be a dependence on the supernatural. There's going to be a dependence on the Spirit beginning to work, and maybe as we understand people and their problems, image-bearers with capacities that have been corrupted, maybe as this becomes clearer and clearer to us, the idea of a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare will begin to make sense. Maybe we'll begin to realize that supernatural passions of the Holy Spirit literally, within a Christian person who's indwelt by God Himself, God the Spirit, can actually come out of that person and, according to supernatural wisdom, can move into somebody else's soul and a difference can be made. Maybe we'll begin to realize that we are absolutely dependent on God once we understand the mess that we're in. Perhaps a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare will lead us into the joys of brokenness, and the joys of repentance. I don't believe you'll ever provide, I don't believe that I'll ever provide effective SoulCare if I'm not in a state of repentance and brokenness.

See, the fact is, we cannot move one inch toward the vision that God has for us; we cannot move one inch toward the vision that we long to reach for ourselves; we cannot move one inch toward it; we can make no progress toward it at all without a miracle. That's brokenness. I can't do it. I am a broken man, God. I am lost. I can't move in the direction I was designed to move. I am a broken man. What do you want to do with this mess that you have? Bless the mess or replace the mess? Brokenness. And then perhaps we can see how wrong it is to enter that mall and to say, "Well, here's where I am, but I sure know what I want; I want a new suit, better pair of shoes, great restaurant, I want to get a good meal. I am going to go this way. I am going to go to the better life." And we can see—wait a minute. This isn't what God has called us to. God has not called us to a better life. He has called us to a better hope and we can begin to repent. We can begin to repent and say that we have basically been living the Christian life not to draw close to You, not to enjoy Your presence, not to become like You and to reveal You in this mess of a world, but we've been living the Christian life wanting to use You to get us where we want to go, to what we wrongly think is the whole point of life. God, I am a broken mess who can't move in a good direction without You and I've been determined to move in a bad direction. God, I stand repentant in Your presence.

Let me make this practical if I can. Let me make this practical as we continue our journey toward being prepared to offer the incredibly important and vital and supernaturally powerful work of SoulCare. Look at the familiar picture. A person shares where they are. You are here. The vision we have for them must not be the better life of your marriage is better, your kids are better, your health is better, your job is better, your ministry is better, your impact is better, things are better in your life. That isn't it. The vision that we have for people, the vision that God has for people, that somehow, in the middle of wherever they are, that all the details of this journeying reality can actually be redeemed by the Spirit to move them into the presence of God, where the better hope of becoming close to God, of becoming more like God can be realized. That's the hope. That's the excitement. That's the thrill of providing SoulCare.

But then, in our curiosity, we begin to explore beneath the surface of where this person is, still exhilarated about the prospect of being in a better place, and reaching that better hope, not going

toward the better life that we still kind of think we ought to have. And then, in our curiosity, we discover that beneath this journeying reality there is a whole story that's invisible to most people. But a SoulCarer opens his or her eyes enough to see that there really is a story going on; there's a story of a soul that is trying to make it without God, the story of a soul without the Spirit. And as you begin to see that story and begin to realize how this image-bearer, with capacities to relate, has corrupted all those capacities and is not even moving toward the vision—and has no power to move toward the vision, and nothing will ever happen from this story to move toward the vision—we realize there's no path from here to here; it doesn't exist. There's just no path.

So, how do we feel at that point? Well, that's where we get a little bit discouraged. That's where we begin to wonder, "Well, what do we do?" We've been curious. We want to know this person. We want to know what's happening inside. We're excited knowing the Spirit is at work, but how does He work? Does He bless this mess? Does He take all this stuff and somehow improve it and socialize it? We know that the Spirit is moving toward a wonderful vision and we're excited, but how do we participate? How do we tag along on the Spirit's work? We're dependent; we begin to realize, the more we see the story of the soul without the Spirit, we realize our dependence. "God, this is all of You. The pressure is off me. I don't need to come up with proper empathy skills and get the clever questions and do it just right and become a professional at this, because that's not going to do it. This is going to require something way beyond the highest level of professional skill. This is going to require an intrusion from another world. The Spirit of God is going to have to move with power if a person with this kind of story is going to reach the vision that we have.

So we're curious, we're excited, we're dependent, and then we're also called upon to be courageous. Called upon to be courageous enough to enter this person's relational story and feel awed and overwhelmed by it. So we start to reframe in our courage. We begin to ask people more about their story; and we say to the gentleman who tells us he's spiritually dry, "That's your journeying reality; that's your presenting problem. You tell me that you're spiritually dry and you're not enjoying the presence of God very much in your life." I wonder if this guy is really heading toward a better life. Maybe a deeper experience of God that he can manage that will make him happier. Or is he moving toward what the better hope really is, actually existing in the presence of God and maybe experiencing Him, maybe not experiencing Him, but being anchored by the reality of God in a way which releases him to be more like Jesus in his marriage, with his children, in his job? What is he heading toward—the better life or the better hope? And you begin getting curious about these kinds of things, and so you say to him, "Well, tell me a little more about this spiritual dryness." And he shares a few things, and then you reframe, and you say, "Well, tell me who else you've told about your spiritual dryness." And you ask him, "Well, what happened when you shared your story with somebody else? You shared it with your wife, did you?"

"Yeah, she knows how dry I feel. I've let her know."

"Then tell me what she said."

"Well, you know..."

You're in his relational story of his present primary relationships. You've reframed away from dryness to his relational story. "You told your wife."

“Yeah.”

“What’d she say?”

“She told me I was pretty insecure.”

I wonder how I would feel if my wife said to me I was pretty insecure when I shared a burden with her. Wonder how I do feel when I share certain things with people, my wife and other friends, and they don’t respond according to what I think they ought to do. And they don’t seem to make me feel better. And they don’t act supportive. And they don’t act interested enough. What do I feel? I get angry, disappointed. I wonder if this guy knows how he feels? So I say to him, “Well, tell me how you felt when your wife said that.”

“You know, my wife’s a good wife, and I think she’s making a really good point and I need to deal with that.”

Well, maybe the fact of the matter is he really does feel patient with his wife, but I don’t know. It’s a little more mature than most people to be able to think like that. “The deepest desire you’re aware of”—I start wondering out loud as I talk to this gentlemen in the SoulCare relationship—“Maybe the deepest desire that you’re aware of, that in your mind, if it happens, you’ll have a better life, is minimal conflict with the important people in your life. Maybe the reason you didn’t say to your wife, ‘Honey, that frustrates me the way you talked right there and I’m really a little bit upset. No, no, no, I’m a lot upset with the way we’re relating right now.’” I’m not saying he should say all that, but the reason that he didn’t say all that is maybe his deepest desire is not to represent Jesus Christ to this woman’s soul. Maybe his deepest desire is to have no conflict with this woman. He’s going to a better life. He’s not moving toward a better hope. So that’s the story of his soul without the Spirit, or at least a little part of it. Maybe he’s perceiving that the best life he can have is a life where he’s never exposed as being unwanted and undesirable, so he always portrays this pleasant persona and his wife just sees him as kind of weak and insecure, but kind of a nice guy to have around. And maybe that’s the best life he can believe is available to him given his history with his mother and his dad and his relational encounters in high school, and his youth pastor and his first girlfriend that dumped him, and all the rest of his stories. And maybe his goal then is really to protect himself from ever being exposed as weak and his strategy, therefore, is to retreat.

So he’s moving toward a better life on his terms that really is foolish. And he’s not living out the Gospel in his life at all, and as a man providing SoulCare for him, do I begin to discern the story of his soul without the Spirit in a way that makes me realize we need a miracle here? We need the movement of God’s Spirit. I can’t change any of this. I can interpret, I can give him insight, but all it’s going to do is discourage him. Maybe his emotions, maybe there’s some anger, maybe there’s some contempt for himself that he doesn’t want to face because it messes up his pleasantness in life, and so he pretends he really isn’t feeling all that.

And if you’re following all that I’ve just been talking about, you understand I’ve gone about halfway through the chart. Journeying reality, vision, reframing, relational story, listening with certain categories, like the image of God and what that means, and come to see that there really

is a mess. So where does that leave you in your life of providing SoulCare? If this were the last presentation, and I were stopping right now and said, “There you have it. Go provide SoulCare,” I would hope that most of you would walk away from this and say, “I wish I never would have seen it. I don’t want to provide that kind of SoulCare. All I am going to do is make people miserable. I thought SoulCare was about encouraging people. I thought SoulCare was about helping them achieve a better life. Things are a mess. What do I do?” You and I will never discover spiritual wisdom until our hunger for it is our strongest hunger. You and I will never discover the miraculous work of the Spirit as He moves in people’s lives until we face the mess so thoroughly and deeply that our response is, “God, I must hear from You. If I don’t hear from You and reflect You and depend on You and experience Your power, there’s no point in having any conversations with anybody. Let’s go back to surface conversations. Let’s just have as much fun as we can. Let’s make church as pleasant an experience as we can. Let’s never turn our chairs; it will just make us miserable. But God, I don’t believe You’ve left us to be miserable. I believe You’ve called us to a better hope. God, what’s it all about?” Are we hungry to know God?

Many years ago, a mentor of mine who’s now with the Lord, listened to me teach for two semesters in a seminary. The class I was teaching was essentially the class I’m in abbreviated form teaching to you right now: understanding people and problems. I lectured four hours a week for the whole academic year, two semesters, and he sat through every lecture. He listened to well over a hundred hours of my lectures on my topic of understanding people and problems. When the last lecture was completed, and I was tired and exhausted—and I had a great class, the students were responsive, and it went well; I left the class feeling somewhat fulfilled and feeling pretty good about myself, I guess—I walked down the hallway with Dr. Smith, my friend and mentor, after he listened to me for a hundred hours, and he said, “Um, Larry, I’ve been to your class the whole year and I think I hear what you’re saying.”

And I went, “Oh, that’s good. What is it?”

He said, “I think you’re saying two things.”

My first thought was, “A hundred hours is reducible to two things?” I wasn’t real thrilled. But I was curious enough to overcome that and say, “Well, what are those two things?”

He said, “Well, from all that you’ve said, I’ve picked up two ideas. First is this: We hurt a whole lot more than we know. And secondly, our sin is a whole lot worse than we think.”

Well, I did feel a little reduced—a hundred hours of lecture that could have been said in about five seconds. But he was on to something there. He helped me see what I was trying to say—that the story of a soul without the Spirit is full of pain and sin; we’re helpless and we’re hopeless and there’s no way to bless this mess. And it occurred to me that we better face that. So I wrote a book. Wrote a book called *Inside Out*. In the book, I basically said, if you take a deep look into your life, what you’re going to find is terrible and loathsome sin, and you’re going to feel totally defeated by it. And I called people to get real; let’s face the reality of where we are. So I wrote the book. Got a lot of letters. The theme of so many of the letters was this: So where’s the hope? So you’re right; when I face my life, I can see that I’m in pain and I can see that I am using my capacities to relate in ways that leave me just miserable way down deep, and I’m trying to pretend

I am not that way, and I can see that I am self-protected and living a life that's oriented all around me, and I am trying to find myself and protect myself, and all the things I do with people have me in mind, and that's wrong. That's idolatrous. That's self-centered. I'm a mess. I hurt, and I sin. So, what do I do? Where's the hope?

It's a good place to be, to ask that question. Only in brokenness do we discover beauty. Only in desperation do we discover hope. Only in abandonment do we discover love. Only in terror do we discover faith. If you're going to provide SoulCare, if I'm going to provide SoulCare, maybe we need to start with facing the story of the soul without the Spirit and then get hungry for God as never before.

I wrote a new last chapter for the book *Inside Out*, when it was published in its tenth anniversary edition. In the new last chapter, I expressed what I discovered in my journey. The new last chapter that now completes the book *Inside Out* is entitled, "There's Something Good Beneath the Bad." Everything we've seen so far in our discussion of understanding people and their problems is the result of you and me seeing where we are and trying very hard to getting to the better life that we think is going to make us happy.

We're trying very hard to live the way we should. We're living under the terms of an arrangement where we believe that if we're going to receive blessing and have what we want, then if we work hard, and do the right thing and are obedient enough, then it will all work out. So we keep casting about for a way to live. We keep casting about for some technique, or some method. We read about a man who's parenting his children in a certain way, and we hear the way he's doing it, and his kids are turning out well, and we say, "I'll try that." We're pastors and we listen to a pastor tell the story of what he did in his church and his church went from two hundred to two thousand and we say that, "I'll try that." So all of us basically are wherever we are and we're moving toward this better life with all the fury and energy and activity and desperation we can muster, and we're looking for some way to get to this better life.

Well, let me tell you folks, that when you strategize to reach a better life, you're living what the Bible calls the old way. What I'm discovering in my journey is that God has called us to a better hope and it's not by strategizing. It's not by figuring out the principle that works. It's, rather, a listening to the voice of the Spirit who moves us into the presence of the Father. I believe with all my heart, I believe with all my soul, that there's a new way to live, and SoulCare is all about exposing the old way for what it is—hopeless, helpless—and against the background of despair and discouragement, hearing Jesus come and say, "I've got really good news for you people. There's a new way to live."

Now, let me show you one last sketch, and then we're going to finish this course. One last simple sketch. It begins with the old familiar sketch. Here's a person journeying through their life—a journeying reality. We envision what the Spirit of God could do; we look beneath the journeying reality and we see the story of a soul without the Spirit. And then we realize that Jesus Christ has invaded our lives and He has forgiven us for all of this and He's put in our hearts the possibility of an entirely new story. There's the story of a soul with the Spirit. I call that Spirit dynamics; there are new forces within us. Then the old flesh dynamics—and SoulCare is all about seeing this well enough to hate it—and seeing this and touching this. "No, I don't want to erase that." Seeing this and touching this well enough to release it.

When the power that God has put within me is released, there's movement toward the vision. SoulCare is a very, very high calling because SoulCare is all about encouraging people to live the new way of the Spirit that God tells us is available. In order to do that, we need to have resources that are not available to us apart from the Spirit. In the next course, we're going to look at the resources that God has given to every follower of Jesus to live the new way.

Discussion Questions

Discuss your agreement/disagreement with this sentence: SoulCare is not about good technique; it is about genuine relating.

The broad road leads to soul death. The narrow road leads to soul life. The broad road might be defined as pursuing a better life of blessings now. The narrow road is wanting nothing more than knowing God and revealing Him to others, knowing every imaginable blessing will be ours forever. Discuss: SoulCare exposes “broad-road living” and entices people to “narrow-road living.”