

Course Leader Guide

CC204

SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

By: Dr. Larry Crabb

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Lesson 1 Study Guide

CC204

***SoulCare Foundations IV:
Community—Where
SoulCare Happens***

Sacred Companions on a Sacred Journey:
Three Defining Elements of Supernatural
Relating

Updated 2015



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Objectives

In this lesson, we think through what it means to become a sacred companion.

When you complete this lesson, “Sacred Companions on a Sacred Journey: Three Defining Elements of Supernatural Relating,” you should be able to:

- Explain the three unique principles of spiritual formation.
- Discuss the hindrances to spiritual formation.
- Review key concepts of previous SoulCare courses.
- Envision how SoulCare might become a reality in our lives and in our churches.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson One: Sacred Companions on a Sacred Journey: Three Defining Elements of Supernatural Relating

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

As we begin our final of four courses on the topic of SoulCare, I want to set the stage with you by asking you to reflect on two sentences—on words that were spoken several hundred years ago by a medieval mystic named Meister Eckhart. Listen to what he said: “God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk.”

I want you to listen to those two sentences again. But this time, as you listen, let me ask you to close your eyes. And as I read those two simple, short sentences a second time, pay attention to what you feel. Pay attention to what happens inside of you as you listen to two, I think, profound sentences that really govern all that we’re talking about in SoulCare. People who provide effective SoulCare practice tuning in to what is going on inside of them. It isn’t a question of figuring out what’s happening in somebody else; it’s tuning in to what’s happening inside of you. So practice that just for a moment. Close your eyes and tune in to what happens inside of you as I read these two sentences again, spoken several hundred years ago by a spiritual mystic.

Here are the words: “God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk.” Open your eyes and ask yourselves, “What do you hear? What did you hear? What are you thinking as you hear that? What do you feel?”

Let me share what happens inside of me as I ponder those words. I feel two things. I feel both exposed and enticed. Somewhere, down deep inside of me, I know that I’ve walked away. I don’t know what that means, but I know I’ve walked away. I know that the Bible is true about me when it says that I’m like a sheep that has turned to its own way. I’ve walked away, and I’m not always certain how I’m doing that. I don’t know what that looks like at a moment of interaction with my wife or at a moment of interaction with a son or a good friend or a job decision. But I know that there is something in me that moves away, and I feel, when I hear those sentences, exposed and uncomfortable. I’ve been drawn away from home, and I’ve followed my own way.

But maybe more than exposed, I also feel enticed. The enticement is this—and my guess is you’re feeling the same thing: I want to come home. There’s something in me that just longs to go back to the home, to the fire, to the sitting in the comfortable chair with a hot chocolate. There are all those images that call us into the safety and the rest of being at home. There’s something in me that wants to come home. I’m not sure if I know the road that will get me there. I’m not sure if I know what home looks like or how to get there. I do know that in some sense my home is in God, and I want to meet Him, but I’m not sure how to do that. And I do sense—and I think I sense this because I’m a Christian—I do sense that there is a way to get home. I might need encouragement, and I might need a fair amount of help to get there, but there is a way. And I know—and I can say

it glibly or I can say it meaningfully—that Jesus Christ Himself is the Way. He says that He has provided us with what He called a new and living way. A way to what? Well, a way to our home. A way to what it means to come back from our straying, into the center of who we truly are. And I find myself longing— and this, perhaps, is the theme of our entire course on SoulCare—I find myself longing, as I walk home, to walk with somebody else.

I find myself longing to find somebody who’s a little further ahead of me on the path, who can say, “No, Larry, not quite there. Come this way. Here, take my hand. Walk with me home.” I want someone to care for my soul, someone who can support me on the journey home and to shine a light on the path when it’s hard for me to see the pathway home.

So my reaction to those two sentences is to feel both exposed and enticed. There are different levels of contemplation, different levels of meditation. As I have meditated on those sentences even more, my reaction of being exposed and enticed goes even deeper, and I find three thoughts stirring very deeply within me, thoughts that really sharpen what it means for me to be exposed and enticed. Let me share these three thoughts with you.

Let me tell you what they are and then spend some time commenting on them. Thought number 1—and this is remarkable; let the weight of these words hit you: God’s home is now in me. That’s my first thought. God’s temple, God’s sanctuary, the place where He lives, is literally now in me. As surely as I live in my home, God now lives in me. Thought number 1: God’s home is now in me.

Thought number 2: When I walk away from God, I walk away from me. When I walk away from God, like a sheep going astray, not only do I walk away from God—which is the central disaster—but secondarily, and yet very importantly, I walk away from me. I walk away from who I am. No wonder I feel unfulfilled and empty and not alive and not manly or, if a woman, not feeling womanly. No wonder something goes wrong within me, because when I walk away from God, I’m walking away from me. That’s the second thought.

And the third thought that follows from the first two: The only way to discover me, the only way to find my true self, is to come home and to come home to God.

Let me elaborate on these three thoughts, three key ideas that, as we begin to think about our last course on SoulCare and what it means to move into somebody else’s life and to care for their souls, three key thoughts that will give us a framework for our last considerations on what it means to provide SoulCare.

Thought number 1: God’s home is now in me. God once spoke—if you know your biblical history, you’ll know this—God once spoke from outside me. Once He thundered from Mount Sinai, and He talked about the law outside of me. He said, “Larry, here’s what you need to do. Let Me give you My standards. Shape up. Do what you’re told. Don’t do this. Do do this.” He’s outside of me, and He’s talking, and then I have to sit there and listen to someone outside of me talking. But the fact is that, because of the New Covenant, He’s no longer speaking from Mount Sinai. Now He’s literally speaking from inside my soul, and if I’m to hear God as I spend time in the Scriptures, I’m not hearing Him speak through the Scriptures from outside of me into me. I’m hearing Him speak from within me, because He whispers now to my spirit within the sanctuary that He now

calls home, which is my soul. If that's true, if God's home is now literally in me, then that has some radical implications. The first of which is this: that the journey to experiencing God, which is what my soul wants more than anything else, the journey to experiencing God is a journey into my own interior world. Now think about that for a minute. One of the implications of that thought is that we're not going to find God merely by studying our Bibles. It's possible to know the Bible well. It's possible to know the theme of all sixty-six books and not to know God and not to know yourself. The journey to finding God is not limited to just distancing yourself from the Bible and studying it as an academic document. The only time the Bible becomes real is when you realize God is whispering through His Word from within, as the Bible stirs the reality of God's life within you.

It's also true that we're not going to find God by simply trying to figure out what God wants us to do. "Okay, I'm not getting along with my husband; what am I supposed to do? Okay, my kids are a mess. Okay, I'm depressed; I'm full of anxiety. What am I supposed to do?" That approach to making life work will never lead us to experiencing God.

That approach will lead us to a sense of pressure. And if things work, it will lead us to an experience of pride: "Well, I guess I got it right." Or, if it doesn't work, to discouragement: "I guess I didn't get it right."

The journey to God, though clearly directed by the inerrant Word of God, the journey to God, though clearly directed by the Bible and accompanied by a desire to do what's right, is a journey into my own soul, and it's a journey into your soul, because that's where God is present. That's the temple He lives in.

And when I contemplate, when I ponder myself, when I look inside of my own heart and when I do it prayerfully, meditatively, contemplatively, then maybe there's the possibility that I will actually hear the whisper of the Spirit from within His sanctuary, in the very center of my being.

That's the first thing I notice—that God's home is now in me and the implications of that fact are radical.

The second thing that I notice is this: that when I walk away from God, I walk away from me. To put it differently—I walk away from who I really am. I walk away from my true self when I walk away from God.

Now a question occurs. Why would anybody do that? Do we not want to be our true selves? Do we not want to know the God of the universe who loves us, who sent His Son to die for us? Why do we walk away from ourselves, and walk away from God, and take off from home, and experience all the consequences of being distant from God? Surely nobody—I can't imagine anybody—would ever walk away from God if they thought it would result in losing their sense of identity, if they thought it would result in losing their sense of joy. Why would anybody walk away from their home? Why would anybody walk away from God?

But because we do—the Bible says it, and our lives are a testimony to how often and regularly and reliably we do so—because we do walk away from God, then it must mean that somehow we're very, very deceived in at least two ways.

First, we think we need something other than God to be whole. Something in my mind says, “Having God is good, but it’s not enough. I need a loving spouse. I need the right kind of family. I need a certain kind of health. I need a certain kind of ministry,” and so I walk away from God, thinking perhaps I’m pursuing Him. I walk away from God to get what it is I really need, and the center of my life becomes something other than God, because I’m deceived into thinking that I need something other than God in order to be whole. That’s how we’re deceived.

A second way that we’re deceived—you’ve all experienced this in your own life and you know people of whom this is true. You know that we sometimes actually convince ourselves that we’re walking toward God. We’re doing His will. We’re living as good Christians. We’re following His plan for our lives—when, in fact, we’re moving away from Him. The man who tries hard to get his life together, the woman who works hard at keeping her family together, the adolescent who thinks hard about what career to pursue, and who places total emphasis on getting life together, getting family together, getting career together—each may think that they’re pursuing the spiritual path. Each may think that they’re walking the spiritual journey, but, in fact, they may be looking for themselves someplace other than in God.

In *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis writes about people who prefer to be away from home, with themselves at the center, than to be home with God at the center. He describes folks who tenaciously cling to a favorite pleasure—in one case intellectual debate, in another mothering an only child—a pleasure that the person thinks they need to fill their souls with joy. This is what I need. This is the pleasure that is required for my soul to be whole. And Lewis goes on to describe how, when we hug a favorite pleasure close to our chests—whether that pleasure is obviously a bad thing (like sexual addiction) or something which looks wonderfully important (like parenting)—when we hug any pleasure to our chests closely, other than God, we never find our way home to the glorious freedom of living adventurously and meaningfully out of our true center.

At one point Lewis observes about these people who fail to come home: There is always something they’d prefer to joy. We walk away from home.

A close look at our backgrounds—and in SoulCare you get to know each other, you explore and discover what is happening in people’s hearts—and when you get ahold of a person’s background and come to know what’s happening in a person’s life, you begin to understand that there’s something that we have learned has more value to our soul’s well-being than a deeper relationship with God.

One man told me that his father once said to him, “I know you’re mad at me. I can see it in your face. You’re trying to hide it. You tell me you’re not angry. (The boy was about sixteen or seventeen years old, and the father was a mean kind of a guy.) I know you’re mad at me. I will not stand for disrespect. You are wrong to be angry with me. I can see it in your face, even though you deny it.” As a result, that boy got into significant trouble. And at that particular moment in a SoulCare conversation, he made clear to me that he made what I choose to call a defining decision. He made a defining decision, and the decision could be expressed this way: “If I can’t hide what I feel, then I won’t feel anything. When I feel things that get me in trouble, and I can’t hide them, and I get whacked in the head by my dad for showing anger that I was trying to hide—if I can’t hide what I feel, then I simply will make the choice to shut down my interior world, and I will choose to feel nothing.”

I can recall a woman I chatted with who, at age eleven, after a moment of terrible abuse, made a decision that she would never cry again. It wasn't until she was in her late 40s, in an extended SoulCare conversation, where she broke down in tears, and that's when a new sense of her life began.

This man who made a decision that "I will never feel anything, because I can't hide what I feel and that kind of vulnerability gets me in trouble"—he said to me with his head buried in his hands and weeping: "I just can't find me. I have no idea who I am." Well, of course. Why? Well, he left home. He left home to find what he preferred to God.

In this particular man's case, what he preferred to God was the safety of feeling nothing that might get him in trouble, and the goal of feeling nothing that might get him in trouble, that became his home, his false home, and so he left his true home to find his false home, and as a result, he lost himself.

God is at home in our hearts. It is we who have left the center of our hearts, the center of who we truly are in Christ, and have gone out for a walk in search of something that we believe is far more valuable for our soul's health than knowing God—something that we think will bring us more joy and will protect us from more pain than if we abandon ourselves to God.

There is nothing that the sighted person sees that is more attractive than Christ. Why? It doesn't exist. But we think it does. That means we're blind. We're deceived. We're hallucinating. Nothing better than God exists, but we think that having a godly child, having a godly marriage, having a healthy bank account, having an experience in our hearts—we think something is better than having God, so we leave home to find it. That's the second thing I notice in Meister Eckhart's words—when I walk away from God, I walk away from me.

The third observation that I draw from Meister Eckhart's words—the only way to find me, the only way to discover who I really am, my true self, is to come home to God. But that presents a problem. Sometimes I don't know how to do that. Sometimes in the middle of a crisis, in the middle of a battle, in the middle of discouragement, I don't know what it means to come home to God. It's even the case that sometimes I don't know that I have walked away from Him. I don't recognize the flesh dynamics that are ruling within my soul. I don't recognize that there is a strategy, and a determination within me, to find some way to make my life work without God, and I don't see when I'm doing that. My flesh dynamics are oblivious to me. I don't see it. I need help.

Secondly, I may have lost hope. Not only do I not see my own flesh dynamics, but there are times that I lose hope. And you can relate to this, I imagine. When we get so tangled in our own efforts to make our lives work, and we're trying so hard to get closer to a spouse or work through a conflict with a friend or deal with a child's situation—we're trying so hard to make life work that we've lost sight of who we could become. We lose sight of who we are in Christ and who we could become in Christ. I may have no idea at all of my true self, of who I was uniquely created to be, and who I will become when Christ is formed in me. I may have no clear categories for understanding my own story. And as I think back on all of the things that have happened in my life—as you think back on all the things that have happened in your life—not only do we lose sight of our flesh dynamics, not only do we lose a sense of hope that we could become somebody real, but we have

no categories for thinking through all the things that have happened in our past. And I may have no one in my life—and this is the tragedy that this whole SoulCare curriculum is attempting to do something about—I may have no one in my life (and for most Christians this is true) with the passion of curiosity, who will listen to me tell my story, and with the wisdom of discernment, who can recognize how my flesh is in holy tension with my spirit so that I can. As a result, I never tell my story. There's no one who is listening with wisdom, and so, I live alone.

I believe that describes the experience of most Christians in the world today. Many people are sitting in churches, coffee shops, restaurants, and sporting events, all across the world, and these people desperately need SoulCare. They need to engage in conversations over a period of time with someone who knows that God is at home in their hearts—somebody who has the confidence in the New Covenant to believe that now the Spirit has taken up residence in the soul of this Christian person. And as they talk about their life, and talk about their struggles, and talk about their backgrounds, and talk about all the things that are going wrong, that the person has a confidence that, in the center of their being, the living God exists. God is at home in their hearts.

They need to engage in conversation with someone who knows that, but who also knows that they've walked away from God and that they are literally in danger of losing themselves. They need to be talking with somebody who knows also that there is a way back home. Wouldn't it be something if we could talk with somebody who has found that way, the way that is opened up through Christ, and is finding their way back through all of the difficult realities of life—historical and present, all the tangled emotions inside the soul, all the frustration—and they've found the path from where they are back home, and they can lead another person home to find God?

These people, all of us, need a sacred companion—a sacred companion to join them on the journey home. The sad reality is that there are only a few people, a very few people, who are able to provide SoulCare. And I say it with great regret, there are very few churches that regard SoulCare as the center of their mission. This course comes out of a passion, a passion that God placed within me, to see a revolution in how we relate to each other, to see a revolution develop in how a church is released to become a community where SoulCare conversations are the norm, how a church can become a community of Jesus-seekers who journey together, openly, vulnerably, and honestly, and who journey together to God in relationships, first, of SoulCare and then, in relationships that involve evangelism.

As we prepare for this last series of lectures, let me review very simply and suggest to you what you already know—that, in course number 1, we talked about ten key foundations—each one rooted in biblical theology, not in tradition—ten key foundations for developing the passion and wisdom that we need to provide effective SoulCare. We introduced the idea of the passion-wisdom model of SoulCare and laid out ten key foundations for developing that model. That was course number 1.

In course number 2, I presented a basic model, a basic model to follow as we engage in SoulCare conversations, a kind of roadmap, so that when you're sitting and talking with people, and you're feeling inadequate, and they're confused, and you get annoyed with them, and they're telling stories that you can't relate to, and you're just confused, and you want to get out of there and go watch television, that maybe if you have a basic model that can anchor you a bit—a basic model

to keep in mind as we enter the messy interior world of people's lives as we're faced with our own inadequacy and our own confusion, and as we seek to engage people deeply with the passion of Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit—I presented a basic model in course number 2.

In course number 3, we spent our time thinking about provisions and practice. What has God made available? What are the provisions that God has given to us through the New Covenant that makes SoulCare possible? You see, SoulCare is not possible in the secular community in anything close to the same way that it is possible in the spiritual community. What is SoulCare dependent on? What are the provisions that God has made available that makes true SoulCare possible? And how will we relate to people, how will we practice SoulCare, if we're depending on those provisions?

Well, with all that in place, with all the material from courses 1, 2, and 3 in our minds, I want to devote this fourth course to thinking through how SoulCare could actually become a reality in your life—that you could meet a friend at a coffee shop; that you could go out for lunch after church on Sunday morning; that you could sit down with a group of people and find yourself engaging in meaningful SoulCare conversations. Can SoulCare become a supernaturally routine reality in our community? How can you join another person on their journey home? That's the question we discuss in our last course.

Discussion Questions

What did you feel as you reflected on the quote of Meister Eckhart: “God is at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk”?

Dr. Crabb makes three observations about Eckhart’s quote. Discuss what you think and feel about each.

- God’s home is now in me.
- When I walk away from God, I walk away from me.
- The only way to discover my true self is to come home to God.

Describe, in your own words, these two deceptions that cause us to walk away from God.

- We think we need something other than God in order to be home.
- We believe we are walking toward God when we are walking away from Him.

How have you experienced these deceptions in the past?

What is a “defining decision”?

We don't return to God for several reasons, among them:

- We do not see our flesh dynamics.
- We lose hope.

What does the phrase "flesh dynamics" mean? When have you experienced these hindrances to returning to God?

When did you last sense a longing to have another person walk with you as you walk home to God?
What did you do about that longing?

Lesson 2 Study Guide

CC204 ***SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens***

Secular vs. Spiritual SoulCare:
The Danger of Blurred Distinctions

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Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb reviews each element of the SoulCare model, in an effort to help you think in a new way about the process of change.

When you complete this lesson, “Secular vs. Spiritual SoulCare: The Danger of Blurred Distinctions,” you should be able to:

- Recount the basic model of SoulCare studied in the previous courses.
- Describe the kind of person who is qualified to provide SoulCare.
- Explain the basic difference between SoulCare and psychotherapy.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Two: Secular vs. Spiritual SoulCare: The Danger of Blurred Distinctions

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

In order to follow what I'm now going to present, it will be very important for you to have the basic model of SoulCare clearly in your mind. And because that's important, I want to again put the picture before you, and I want to ask you, for just a few moments, to reflect on each element. And I really hope as you do—as you hear me review the material that you've already studied—I hope that your reaction will be that you'll realize that you're now thinking in a new way, a new way about the process of change.

Let me talk about each of the elements. As I sketch the model and as I talk about each element in the model, it can be communicated that SoulCare is a very neat, orderly process with arrows moving in the right direction and concepts that are very clear, and that you can just go through the process in this nice clean way, and everything will be fine. And that's not true. There certainly is a rhythmic and a rational flow to a good conversation of SoulCare, but understand that every conversation you have with someone about their life or about your life—every conversation you have will always be a human encounter directed by the Spirit. Flexibility will, therefore, always be necessary. You can't rigidly follow any game plan, and flexibility can feel messy and very disorganized. So, as I review the basic model, understand there's no neatness to the model as it might appear from the description.

Review: SoulCare begins when someone senses enough of the fragrance of grace—both the passions of Christ and the wisdom of the Spirit—when someone senses enough of the fragrance of grace within you to share a journeying reality.

So the first element is a journeying reality somebody makes known to you—something in their lives that they would like to let you know about, to invite you to know them, to invite you to guide them to enter the battle with them. Some element in their life disturbs or maybe excites them, and they want to share something significant with you. SoulCare has begun. The first element: a journeying reality is shared.

Now aware, as a provider of SoulCare, that our hearts are self-deceptive, aware that our hearts are full, not completely, but full of self-centered and self-protective energy, the first thing that the effective SoulCare provider does is not to try to figure out the one who is talking. The first thing the effective SoulCare provider does is not to come up with advice or to understand what's happening or even to empathize or to help the person feel better. The first thing I suggest you must do is become aware of your own interior world. What is happening inside of you as your friend shares their journeying reality? What is your interior world all about? As you enter their interior world, as you enter their inner life, what's happening in your inner life? And as you pay attention to that, as you tune in to what's happening in your own soul, you're asking God for the miracle of the passions of the Spirit to rule as you interact with this friend. And you're open

to facing whatever might be going on in your life that could block the work of the Spirit as you encounter your friend in an exchange of SoulCare. So the second element is facing your own interior world.

And at the same time that you're facing your own inner life, the other major thing you're doing as a person shares their journeying reality is you're thinking vision: Are you developing a vision for that person's spiritual formation? When you look at the other person, no matter what they share—they're talking about their homosexual affair; they're talking about their sexual addiction; they're talking about their depression, their suicidal ideation—whatever they're talking about, no matter how extreme or how light, do we understand that if we think vision, we're trusting God's grace, and our mood is one of celebration?

You see, when I have found the courage to share some tough stuff in my life, and I let somebody know that I'm kind of a mess and things aren't going so well, the first thing I do is my antennae go out, and I pay attention to the person's eyes. Are they rocked by what I've revealed? Are they horrified? Are they distancing themselves? And a few times I've shared something in me that's been really ugly, and I've seen a twinkle in the other person's eye—I've seen them celebrate. What are they celebrating? My sin? My ugliness? Of course not. What they're celebrating is the grace that is sufficient to take me wherever I am and move me toward a vision. So the mood then of the SoulCare provider is exactly what Paul's mood was in Galatians 4:19, when he was looking at the Galatians, who were driving him crazy, and he said, "I want you to know, I'm in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." There was agony, but there was hope. I know what can happen in your life, and I celebrate the power of God as you and I begin to engage in this encounter of SoulCare.

What could this person look like? Ten years from now, if the Spirit has His way in this woman's life, in this man's life, what will this person look like? Listen to the journeying reality with vision in mind.

And then you keep in mind, as you're facing your own interior world, as you're thinking vision with the person who shares their journeying reality, you keep in mind that what is blocking movement toward the vision is never what happened to the person. You keep in mind that what's blocking movement toward the spiritual formation vision you have for them is never the fact that two years ago this teenaged girl was raped. It's never the fact that when this kid was six years old his father beat him to a pulp. It's never the fact that all these bad things have happened. That's never the issue. The issue is that we have an enemy of our soul, and the bad news is he's in us to some degree. There's an enemy within us and around us that is keeping us from moving toward the vision that we have for the individual.

So when you're providing SoulCare, and you get all excited about what could be, you've got to get very realistic about what is. And you've got to realize that the block to spiritual formation is the same thing that blocks spiritual formation in you. It's the threefold enemy of the world that offers pleasure in every source but Christ, the devil, that sees to it that you're deceived enough to believe that your soul can find deep and lasting pleasure apart from Christ; and it's the flesh, the enemy within—the flesh within you, the flesh within me—that sorts through all the experiences of my life and comes up with a game plan on how to get my soul together without radical dependence on God. "I will find a way to make my life work without absolute dependence and confidence in

God.” That’s the flesh; that’s the enemy. And as you’re listening to a person share their journeying reality, you’re thinking about the dynamics of the flesh: How has this demanding determination to make life work been influenced by the world and the devil, and how is it now operating in this person’s life? And you’re thinking about that. That’s on your mind. The root obstacle to the goal of SoulCare is what I call flesh dynamics.

And then inwardly, you’re still just talking to yourself as you engage in a SoulCare conversation, as you hear the person share their journeying reality and you’re attending to them—and you have to have a bit of an eight-track mind to follow all this—but the person sharing their journeying reality, and you’re thinking about your own life, you’re thinking about vision, you’re thinking about root obstacles—but then you allow your mind . . . you direct your mind to the good news. You direct your mind to the radical reality inside every believer that I’ve chosen to call Spirit dynamics. There’s something alive in this individual, if this individual knows Jesus Christ as Savior, there’s something alive that, when released, can move the person toward the vision of spiritual formation, and what’s alive in the person is stronger than what’s wrong in the person. The core appetite in the regenerate soul is for God, and that appetite—when identified, nourished, and released—swallows up, nudges aside, overwhelms, overpowers all that’s in the flesh. So you’re thinking about the gospel; you’re thinking about the fact that in the core of this person’s soul, a miracle has occurred under the terms of what the Bible calls the New Covenant. And you recall my discussion of that in my earlier presentations—that as you’re listening to a person share their journeying reality, you’re marveling, something in you is just getting goose bumps over the fact that this person sitting in front of you has been granted by God through the gospel of Christ, a new purity, a new identity, a new disposition or appetite, and a new power—the four elements, the four provisions of the New Covenant.

And so you contemplate that, as the person is sitting there chatting, and you’re looking at them and making eye contact and listening to them, one of the things happening in your soul, in your mind, is . . . “I’m sitting in front of a miracle. This is unbelievable. This person sitting in front of me, who was at a strip joint last night is a fully forgiven saint. This person who just yelled at her husband, and from my perspective is a horrible wife, is absolutely pure in the eyes of God. That’s a miracle.” And you think about that as you’re engaging in SoulCare. You think, “Not only is this person fully forgiven with a new purity, but they are also fully identified with God. This person is now adopted as a child of God.” And so, when the man tells you that he was homosexually raped ten years ago in an encounter on a church retreat, and you hear these horrible things, you don’t say to yourself, “I’m sitting in front of a rape victim.” What you say to yourself is: “I’m sitting in front of God’s man, who experienced the horrors of rape. But identity is not what happened to you; identity is not even your giftedness; identity is who you are in Christ—a new identity. And you’re just celebrating the thought that this person, who is so addicted to drugs or alcohol or sex, is somebody who, because of the new appetite provided in the New Covenant, is a changed person. This is not a sex addict that you’ve got to find some way to get them to be pure; this is someone who has an appetite for holiness already within them. And you facilitate its release, and you start thinking about how the Spirit works, and the dynamics of the Spirit as revealed in the New Covenant: a new purity, a new identity, a new appetite, and lastly, a new power.

You begin to realize that the person you’re sitting in front of—no matter what their journeying reality, no matter what their story—you are sitting in front of a temple of God. You are sitting in front of the sanctuary where God Himself lives, because His Spirit indwells every believer.

You're not clear about how it all works (never will be until we get "home," I don't suppose), but you know that all of that is enough—all of the spiritual dynamics provided in the New Covenant—it's enough for someone to spiritually form. And so, as you engage in SoulCare, your entire dependence is on what I call Spirit dynamics. And you're thinking about that.

Now with all that in your mind, you enter the battle for their soul. How do you do that?

You enter the battle for their soul by reframing and putting the frame around something other than the immediate problem, and you invite them to talk about the story of their soul. You lead the conversation away from the journeying reality after you've listened, you've understood, you've probed, you've paid attention. But, what you're really interested in is not the bad things that are happening right now; you're really interested in their whole journey. You're interested in the whole story of their soul. And so you listen to both the content of their story—to see how flesh dynamics have been shaped within them, to see how spiritual deformation has already occurred; you're listening for spiritual deformation as you hear the story of their soul.

But as you listen, you also attend to how the flesh is showing itself right now as they tell the story of their soul. You're paying attention to the immediate relationship between the two of you, and the way you do that (recall an earlier concept that I taught) is by noticing how the person is pulling you to respond. As they tell their story, what are they asking you to do? Are they asking you to feel sorry for them? Are they asking you to sympathize with them? Are they asking you to take their side? Are they asking you to really get in there and make it all happen? What are they asking you to do? And you begin to become aware that there is something going on in their soul—their flesh dynamics—that is pulling you to cooperate with their agenda to make life work without God.

So all that is happening in you as you get them to talk about the story of their soul: their present relationships, family and friends; their past relationships, mom and dad; other significant influences; their immediate relationship with you in terms of pull; and, of course, their deepest relationship—how is their relationship with God? What is their understanding of how God is speaking to them right now?

So all of that is the reframing process to get people to talk about their story, the story of their soul. And as you listen, you're listening with biblical categories of understanding. There are biblical categories of understanding that give you the basis for listening to them as they tell their story. You have theological categories. You can't provide effective SoulCare without a good biblical theology of who a person is. Call it anthropology. Without an anthropology, without a good understanding of . . . Who is this person? What does it mean to be a human being? Do you have a category for thinking that through? And where do problems come from? Who is the person? And what is the source of their problems? Theologically, that means you need to have a biblical anthropology—who is the person?—and a biblical hamartiology—a theology of sin, of flesh dynamics.

And so you begin to develop that by thinking that the person sitting in front of you bears the image of God. That's the foundation for every biblical anthropology. For any biblical anthropology, it begins with the incredible revelation that Lewis Sperry Chafer once said is the most important revelation the Bible has ever given us about human beings: that we bear the image of God. What

does that mean? Simply, it means this: You bear the image of a relational God. Therefore, you were created for relating, and you have the capacities to relate in a particular way. You have the capacity to enter into deep relationship, because you bear the image of God; that's a category for understanding. And so when you hear the person tell the story—when they were five years old, their father neglected them in some particular form—this person had the capacity to relate to their father, even when their father disappointed them, in a godly way. But she didn't do it. Why? Because your second category for understanding people is hamartiology.

Your first category is anthropology—they bear the image, they have categories for relating. But your second category is that those capacities for relating have been corrupted, and their sin is now that they prefer some pleasure more than they prefer knowing God.

So when that little child was so badly neglected by her daddy, and she had the capacity to relate to him in a godly form, her natural bent was to say, "I hurt badly when my daddy does this to me, and trusting God makes no sense, because He's not protecting me from these bad things. So I'm going to find some way to protect myself with my resources." There's that poor little girl's sin nature coming out.

So you have an understanding of who they are and what's gone wrong that gives you a basis for listening to them as they tell their story. And then, without ever pressing for change (The effective provider of SoulCare never presses for change and never measures their success by whether the person is changing, because that isn't up to the SoulCare provider. That's up to the Holy Spirit.), so without ever pressing for any kind of movement or any kind of change, you begin to sense in this individual an understanding of the real battle that's going on in their soul. The real battle, not the superficial battle with the journeying reality: How do I handle my wife? What do I do with my boss? Can you give me some advice on that, dear Abby? No, not that, but the real battle that's always between the flesh and the Spirit. And as you identify that the real battle is: Will I depend on God, preferring Him as my greatest source of joy, honoring Him with all of my heart, and relating in my world the way He calls me to relate, the way my regenerate soul longs to relate? Or will I take care of myself? Why is she treating me this way? I'm so ticked about it. I'm going to handle it this way. And my dad hurt me when I was a kid, and I've learned how to feel nothing, and that's what I'm going to keep on doing.

And when you begin to see the flesh and the Spirit and begin to identify that for the person, what you end up creating is a holy tension. A sense of tension begins developing in the person's soul, a tension between what a person is doing and what he or she longs to do as a regenerate person. The tension is holy. Why do I say that?

The tension is holy, because you can count on the fact that the deepest desire in the redeemed heart is the desire for God. So when the tension becomes evident—like Paul in Romans 7, "I know what I want to do but I don't do it"—he's in tension. "I know what I don't want to do, but I end up doing it." I'm in tension. And Paul says, "In the core of my being, I know I want to go toward God, but something's getting in the way"—the flesh-Spirit battle, holy tension.

As holy tension begins to be felt in the individual, that begins what I called the cycle of spiritual growth. It's set in motion. Where the person begins to realize that they are a broken person—there's a brokenness that comes out of this. "I can't be the person I long to be without

enabling from God. I can't make it on my own. I'm not the person I was created to be." And out of brokenness comes repentance. "I have acted"—this is repentance now—"I have acted as if I preferred the blessings of life over nearness to God. But I know that true life, that my true self, is found in coming home to God. I have been digging broken cisterns long enough. I repent of moving away from home, and I long to come home to God, because I've changed my mind." That's where the deepest joy really is—from brokenness, to repentance, to abandonment.

"I will now yield to my deepest desire to know God, and whatever that means in my relationship with my spouse, with my friends, with my job, I will yield to my deepest desire to know God. And I will measure what I do at this moment of interaction by whether it reflects my desire to experience God as my supreme treasure."

When a spouse criticizes you, and you feel defensive inside, and you want to say, "Well, wait a minute. You're criticizing me, but can I point out to you what you've done?" When you're doing that, what you're saying is: "My supreme treasure is nothing to do with God. My supreme treasure is looking good and justifying myself." And you say, "No, I repent of that, and I abandon myself to God by saying, 'Honey, you're kind of mad at me; I'd love to hear more,' because I really long to be like Jesus. He's my supreme treasure." That's abandonment.

And as you abandon yourself to God, it doesn't always feel good. It's kind of hard sometimes. But as you abandon yourself to God, over time—and I sure can't tell you when; this is the Spirit's decision, not mine—a confidence develops.

The fourth stage in the cycle of spiritual growth: A confidence develops that says, "God is really present with me. God really is my supreme treasure." That's not just a theological truth. It's a felt reality. And so as you abandon yourself to God, the confidence comes as you're willing to wait humbly, making no demands on God. "Well, God, I did it Your way, and look, things are worse than ever." No, it doesn't work that way.

"God, I did it Your way, and things are worse. But I know that You're still worth pursuing, because You're God. You're everything. Your glory is the supreme reality of the universe, and that's what I'm living for. And I will wait until the reality of who You are strikes my soul in a deeper way. Please, God, make it soon, but give me that holy sense of confidence that I'm walking a path that's not only right but brings great, great joy and fullness to my soul."

And as the confidence develops, and as you walk home, you begin to discover your true self, and you begin to realize that what you want to do more than anything else is bless that person that's driving you nuts. What you want to do is affirm that person in the joy that they're having, even though you feel so jealous about it, and you wish that your life were going as well as theirs, and you're jealous, but you realize, "Now wait a minute. My true self isn't jealous at all. My true self really is rejoicing in what's happening in this person's life." And so you begin to share whatever the Spirit's movement is going on in your life. You begin to share whatever is real within you. You gladly move with the Spirit for the single purpose of revealing the character of God in all our relationships and activities.

Folks, that's the basic picture. That's the basic model. And now the big question. If that's the model for SoulCare, then our big question is this: Who is qualified to provide SoulCare? Who is

qualified to lead a soul on that journey? Am I qualified? If I am at all qualified, is it because I've been trained professionally as a therapist? Is your pastor qualified because he's been to seminary? Are you qualified because you've had quiet time every morning for ten years? What experiences, what training, what personal character are required to render someone qualified for the great work of SoulCare?

As we begin a new millennium, I believe that we're in a situation frighteningly similar to the beginning of the last [century] in one important respect. Sigmund Freud was just gaining acceptance for his rather radical view that dark forces were at work in the human personality that a special kind of conversation could effectively address. That special kind of conversation came to be called psychotherapy, which literally means "ministry for the soul," or more loosely, really means SoulCare. But SoulCare, as conceived in the beginning of the last century in the secular sphere, lacked two very essential ingredients.

It lacked an understanding, number one, that the dark forces in the human soul were not the product of poor socialization. They were not the product of evolution gone awry. The dark forces in the human soul were evidence of a soul in rebellion against its Maker and its only true joy. Freud never taught that.

And the second ingredient missing in early forms of SoulCare at the beginning of the last century, the second element missing in secular psychotherapy was this—a realization that a healthy soul is a soul in love with Jesus, and any soul that is not supremely in love with Jesus is not a healthy, formed soul. It's an unhealthy, deformed soul. Psychotherapy became secular SoulCare.

And I'm afraid in our generation, as this new millennium begins, that we're in danger of coming up with an understanding of SoulCare that continues in a secular vein. Who's qualified to provide SoulCare? What kind of training is required? Must it be professional? Can it be economically advantaged to provide SoulCare? Is it a way of making money? Does SoulCare become depersonalized where I become an expert who helps you because I have the proper degrees and credentials? As we enter the new millennium, I would love to see us rethink what spiritual SoulCare really looks like and see that secular SoulCare—psychotherapy—is a counterfeit that needs to be replaced by biblical SoulCare. Who provides it? How does it work? That will be our topic.

Discussion Questions

Why is SoulCare not a neat and orderly process? What would happen if you provided SoulCare following a prescribed process?

How can you more effectively exude “the fragrance of grace within you” so that others are eager to share their journey with you?

How should we listen to a journeying reality, no matter how “ugly” it is (Galatians 4:19)?

Having reviewed the basic model of SoulCare, what concepts did you find the most helpful? Why?

Lesson 3 Study Guide

CC204

***SoulCare Foundations IV:
Community—Where
SoulCare Happens***

SoulCare Through Spiritual Direction and
Spiritual Friendships: The Biblical
Alternative to Psychotherapy

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb discusses who is qualified to provide SoulCare to others. Is the church the place where SoulCare needs to take place in a way that we haven't fully considered?

When you complete this lesson, "SoulCare Through Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Friendships: The Biblical Alternative to Psychotherapy," you should be able to:

- Examine the trends in both secular and spiritual SoulCare.
- Explain the roles of spiritual directors and spiritual friends as providers of SoulCare.
- Review the three levels of psychological and spiritual problems and how they are currently addressed.
- Discuss the relationship between psychological and spiritual problems.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Three: SoulCare Through Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Friendships: The Biblical Alternative to Psychotherapy

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

For a long time, our understanding of SoulCare has been essentially secular. It really began with Freud, a hundred years ago, and we have come up with this thing called psychotherapy, which is really a secular version of SoulCare. It's a way of dealing with people's interior worlds without seeing people as fallen bearers of God's image, without seeing people as in desperate need of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because only the provisions of the New Covenant can deal with the deepest battle going on in the soul. So, secular SoulCare denies solid biblical truth.

But as secular SoulCare became popular, it has become professionalized. It has become a source of economic advantage. It's an industry. And it's become depersonalized into a form of help that requires technical expertise more than personal involvement.

The danger I see is that we could take our new emphasis on spiritual SoulCare and see that go in exactly the same direction as our new millennium begins. A hundred years after secular SoulCare has been popularized into a profession, our world is waking up to the need for spiritual SoulCare, for a way of addressing what is deepest and darkest within us with the hope that we're destined for something even deeper and brilliantly glorious and wonderful, with a longing in the human heart for meaning and for joy that comes from transcendence. And our world now is waking up to the idea of spirituality, and our churches are looking for the kind of conversations that allow people to deal with their core spiritual longings. Words like *spiritual direction* and *spiritual formation* are becoming very popular, and I am glad for that.

But we're in danger, and the danger I believe we're in is that we may move in the same direction our culture moved with secular SoulCare. We may make the same mistake a hundred years later that was made earlier when secular SoulCare became popular. We're in danger of taking the true and biblically significant idea of spiritual SoulCare and letting it become professionalized so that it belongs to a special caste of people and is taken out of organic spiritual community. We're in danger of taking spiritual SoulCare and making the same mistake we made with secular SoulCare and not only professionalizing it, but also turning it to economic advantage so that the way we do it and how we do it and the reason we do it is more influenced by the love of money than the love of God.

And the third danger I see we're in, the third danger that we face as spiritual SoulCare becomes a hot topic, is we can depersonalize this notion of SoulCare so that we direct people on their journey from a relational distance—directing them to good things like spiritual disciplines and sensitivity to the Spirit without the life of Christ pouring out of us into another and arousing their appetite.

You see, SoulCare is intensely soul-to-soul connecting, but we're in danger of depersonalizing it into a technique done by an expert.

And if we go that route, then SoulCare will eventually, in my judgment, be seen as an early 21st-century fad rather than a deep and profound work of God's Spirit. For that reason, as we talk about SoulCare I want to see three things happen. I want to see us continue to de-professionalize and guard against the professionalization of SoulCare. I want to see us realize that SoulCare is not for the professional; it's for the godly person. There is certain training and there are certain experiences that are helpful, but I'm scared of seeing spiritual direction and SoulCare becoming professionally credentialed.

The second thing I want to see happen—I want to see it de-professionalized (number 1)—and I want to see us find a way to nudge economics to the side. They're still granting money a legitimate secondary place. I want to see SoulCare as something that is available in truly spiritual community where the bottom line is the glory of God, not making a living.

The third thing I want to see happen in SoulCare: I want to see it re-personalized, not depersonalized but re-personalized, so that we realize that SoulCare is fundamentally, more than anything else, a union of two souls as together they seek to enjoy the gift of union with God. I want to see it become intensely personal—not the objective professional distance where I back away and dispense technical expertise, but where you and I meet at the level of SoulCare. We must return SoulCare to the church. I don't see any way to accomplish these three objectives until we see the church as the place where SoulCare happens most naturally, most supernaturally, and most organically.

Think about that with me for a bit. What would the word *church* mean to you if church were a community of people who journeyed together to God? Honestly and prayerfully, hopefully, relentlessly. What would the church mean to you if it described a handful of people who made you feel safe enough to be known without fear of judgment, to be explored into the secret recesses of your soul, into those embarrassing feelings and specific memories that are so painful? You know, those unspoken fears that nobody has ever heard you verbalize, those petty thoughts that are so weird, so embarrassing, so awful—what would it mean if church meant a handful of people who made you feel safe enough to be known and explored and discovered? Beneath all the mess there's a miraculously good person, who, beneath all the ugliness, beneath all the junk, beneath all the mess, was possessed of an absolutely wonderful goodness that was divine, a literal divine goodness. The Bible says that we're participants in the divine nature. What would it mean to be in a community of people called the church if that goodness was discovered and honored and valued, and somebody knew how badly you wanted to go toward God, and you wanted to love even though the evidence wasn't terribly compelling?

What would it mean to be in a group of people who knew and were able to explore you, and discovered you, and then could touch you—to be touched by people who simply gave you what was most alive in them with no pressure that it prove helpful? But, rather, people who gave something that ignited a flame within you, so that it became a bonfire that changed the way you lived, and changed the way you thought, and changed the way you related?

What would the word *church* mean to you if it were that? What would the word *church* mean to you if it made you think not of sitting in a large crowd, hearing a choir sing and a pastor preach, but suppose the word *church* made you think instantly of a companion for your journey and a guide for your search? If the word *church* meant sacred companionship, then the word would be as attractive to us as the word *oasis* to a desert traveler. Sacred companionship—not professionalized, not fundamentally economically advantaged, not depersonalized—sacred companionship, SoulCare.

It comes, I believe, in two varieties. Sacred companions are either spiritual friends or spiritual directors. Now, think about what a healthy community looks like—a spiritual community where there’s a companion for every journey (a spiritual friend) and a guide for every search (a spiritual director). Both forms of relating provide meaningful and rich SoulCare. Both are expressions of SoulCare: spiritual friends, more often in small groups, sometimes over lunch or on golf courses; spiritual directors, somewhat more formal perhaps, and perhaps in a structured arrangement, often one-on-one conversations in offices or church buildings or maybe during a spiritual retreat, and sometimes in small groups led by a seasoned spiritual director. Spiritual friends and spiritual directors—if you want to be a provider of SoulCare, then you’re going to be providing either spiritual friendship or spiritual direction. You’re going to become a sacred companion for people.

I want to argue strongly as we think about these two kinds of SoulCare—spiritual friendship and spiritual direction—I want to argue strongly that both are organic elements in true spiritual community. They represent the kind of relational opportunities that develop when Christians take the New Covenant seriously. That’s one of the reasons why I again urge you to read Dwight Edwards’ book *Revolution Within* and to ponder the truth of the New Covenant and to realize that when the foundation of what the gospel really is begins to grip you, then out of that reality—out of that truth, out of being gripped in your soul by the fact that there is a new purity and a new identity and a new disposition and a new power—out of that will come a different way of relating that can be described either as spiritual friendship or spiritual direction. It’s something that happens when the Spirit is working in the hearts of people. It’s something that happens when people are pursuing, with all of their energy and all of their giftedness and all of their opportunities for training, the chance to follow the Spirit together with others in the work of spiritual formation.

Spiritual friendship and spiritual direction at one level *happen*. They are not something that is necessarily planned and structured and organized; there’s an organic element to what we’re talking about. True spiritual community organically breathes relationships where spiritual friendship and spiritual direction take place—just as surely as good soil planted with living seeds and properly watered and exposed to sunlight eventually yields a garden of flowers.

But our culture thinks otherwise. Just as Freud began a way of thinking that taught that only highly trained certified professionals can do the real work of secular SoulCare, so our current awakening to spiritual hunger is encouraging a way of thinking that says (now listen carefully and you may disagree with this; ponder with me) that says that only highly trained, certified, professional spiritual directors can properly enter the battle for someone’s soul and guide them on their journey to God.

I mean this very sincerely when I say to you that the person who has probably, no, not probably, the person who has certainly had the most spiritually directing influence in my life is my wife of thirty-five years. She's not trained in spiritual direction. She's not trained as a counselor. She's not a professional psychologist. But living in that kind of proximity, which marriage obviously requires and we can say it affords, is an opportunity when, if the two souls are both longing to meet God, spiritual direction can take place right there; and it has for me.

But we're coming to a position in our culture that says, "No, we appreciate the value of a good spouse and a good friend, but to get spiritual direction is somehow similar to seeing a highly trained surgeon who can do with your body what only a highly trained surgeon can do, and a spiritual director is like that, and because of his or her training, he or she can do with the soul what only great training affords the opportunity to do." But that re-professionalizes and makes it a technical enterprise again. That's the model we're buying into in our culture. In that model, spiritual friends become second-rate helpers, become little more than practical nurses who can give back rubs and encouraging support while they wait for the doctor to provide what is truly needed by way of professional treatment.

If the word *church* is to regain its rich and full biblical meaning, then I believe we as Christians need to recognize where our understanding of SoulCare, where our approach to providing SoulCare comes out of culture and tradition more than out of biblical theology. Let me show you what I mean. Suppose someone in a Christian church is experiencing a struggle they can't seem to handle. This person's name is Legion. Next Sunday when you go to church and you sit among fifty or five thousand people, look around and realize you aren't the only one. Almost everyone sitting there is in the middle of something for which SoulCare would be wonderfully important.

So here's a person sitting in church who's experiencing something in their life, a journeying reality, and they're not sure how to handle it. Where do they go for help? Well, it all depends on how they think about the nature of their struggle.

If the problem is a physical one, then the direction is clear: See a physician. Get medical help and ask the church to pray, of course, but see a doctor. I support that; that's what I do.

If the problem is practical—a single mother who needs help carpooling or a widow who can't meet her monthly payments—again the source of help might be the church or friends who can help with the carpooling or, out of the deacons' fund, give some money.

But suppose the problem is more personal. Suppose the problem is emotional. Something about how the person is feeling about himself or something about how the person is handling tough times—how they're going through widowhood, financial crisis, marital strife. Suppose the problem is something about relationships gone bad, relationships that aren't going well. Well, I would suggest in our culture, the first fork in the road that most of us come to when we experience a problem is to say, "If the problem's not physical—then, here's the fork—is the problem psychological or is the problem spiritual?"

I remember once asking a seminary student who was taking a course entitled "Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction," and I asked the student what the difference was. And I'll never forget,

when I said to the student, “I see you’re taking a course on spiritual direction and psychotherapy. What’s the difference in the two?” The student—a very bright graduate student, a woman—looked at me as though I had asked the dumbest question on the face of the earth. I mean, it was like, “What’s one plus one? I thought by now you’d know the answer to that.” She was more gracious in her response, but what she said to me was very simply, “Well, psychotherapy is for treating psychological pathology and spiritual direction is for guiding people toward God who have a hunger to know Him.”

So, if your problem is psychological, then find an expert in psychological counseling who can deal with your psychological pathology. If your problem has more to do with your hunger for God, and you aren’t sure how to find your way home, then see a spiritual director or get a sacred companion to guide you on a journey home, but realize that the two are very different things, and there are two different kinds of helping professionals.

Soul pathology and soul hunger—reflect on that for just a moment. Up until the mid-1990s in Western spiritual culture, especially in evangelical Christian culture up until recently, a spiritual problem was commonly defined as having to do with doctrinal ignorance, theological uncertainty, undisciplined living, or moral failure. If any of these were what you were struggling with, see a pastor, get spiritual help. But everything else—anxiety and depression, eating disorders, sexual addictions, aftermaths of childhood abuse—they were all psychological disorders. Spiritual disorders, up until recently, were viewed as just theological problems and moral issues, and everything else—anxiety, depression—were psychological problems.

Up until recently, the church and its resources handled spiritual problems. That’s their domain; that’s what they’re there for. But if a person had a psychological problem, they were referred to a psychotherapist or to other psychologically trained professionals. But things are changing.

As the 21st century approached, a shift has occurred. Spiritual problems are now seen to encompass more of human distress, including now deep, unsatisfied desires to experience oneself as alive, as vital, as longing to have something meaningful to offer.

A spiritual problem is now caught up in whether a woman feels alive as a woman and enjoys her femininity, and a man feels alive as a man and enjoys his masculinity. Now we’re starting to see these things as spiritual issues, matters of the soul. Do I feel fully alive? Am I a meaningful person? Is there a reason to go on? Do I wake up in the morning with a sense of excitement, having something to offer? Now we’re calling those spiritual problems—a hunger for peace, a hunger for joy.

As our spiritual nature has received more recognition as an essential part of what it means to be human, we’ve accepted a new kind of helper in our Christian culture that we now call a spiritual director—someone who can lead empty people to fullness in God. Psychological problems still are assumed to exist as a distinct kind of struggle that spiritual directors are not qualified to touch.

I’ve read probably forty or fifty books on spiritual direction in the last couple of years, and without exception (I think that’s true), without exception, every book that I’ve read that I can recall has some lines somewhere where it says, “Let’s recognize that as spiritual directors, we’re not

psychotherapists. There are psychological problems that we, as spiritual directors, cannot handle.” So we still have a clear distinction between soul pathology and soul hunger.

What do we mean by pathology? Don’t be frightened by a fancy word. What do we mean by psychological problems? There’s still a wall between psychological pathology and spiritual hunger. What do we mean by pathology?

Well, as near as I can tell, it means something like this: You’re a victim of psychological pathology just as a cancer patient is a victim of physical pathology. You’re a victim of psychological pathology if the following is true: Some significant emotional wounding has been suffered, like a father’s neglect or a scout leader’s sexual advance, and a complex of internal defenses has developed to ward off the unbearable pain. And when those defenses are sufficiently maladaptive to prevent the afflicted person from experiencing a sense of personal wholeness and being able to relate well, then we say that psychological pathology is present—a complex of internal unconscious defenses against an unbearable pain that results in a variety of symptoms of what we call psychological disorder.

And when that pathology is visible in distinct symptoms like anorexia, or in poor relational styles like borderline personality disorders, then we think of a psychological problem or a psychological disorder. So, in our culture, the way we are thinking is very much this way: We have psychological problems involving internal pathology, and we have spiritual problems involving internal hunger.

We send people with the first kinds of problems to the psychotherapist, and we send people with problems of the second nature to spiritual direction or back to church. As spiritual direction is gaining recognition as a valid discipline, we’re moving to professionalize this activity with extensive training programs. We’re moving to offering economic advantage to spiritual directors by accepting them as healthcare providers, and we’re depersonalizing spiritual direction into something that a certified expert does to, or on behalf of, a seeker, much as a dentist pulls a diseased tooth.

Psychological problems and spiritual problems exist on a continuum from mild through moderate to severe, and in our culture we’ve recognized this fact by offering three levels of psychological care and three levels of spiritual care. Now, this can be fairly easily sketched, and I want you to get this, because I’m going to propose a whole different way of thinking about what SoulCare could look like in the Christian community. What I’m going to put now before you is a picture that I think describes our culture, but I want to see this change.

This is how it looks now. We have psychological pathology that comes either in the form of severe pathology, moderate, or mild pathology. There’s a whole different category over here called spiritual hunger. And that can be experienced at a severe level, at a moderate level, or at a mild level.

The person who experiences severe psychological pathology requires, in our culture, psychotherapy—somebody who probes deeply into unconscious kinds of conflicts. The person who is suffering from more moderate psychological pathology might not need to go to the highly trained psychotherapist, but can go to a counselor who somehow seems less than a

psychotherapist, somebody who offers insight and perspective. But if your psychological pathology is mild, then perhaps a lay counselor will be able to be helpful—providing support and advice from briefly trained people.

On the other side, if you have a spiritual hunger and the problem is severe, and you're just dying to experience God and you're in a terribly deep, dark night of the soul, then perhaps you need to see a spiritual director, somebody who has the discernment to go into the deepest part of your soul. If your experience in spiritual hunger is more moderate, then maybe on your own you can practice some of the spiritual disciplines without the help of a spiritual director. You can learn to fast and spend time in silence and listening to God, and that will help your spiritual hunger. If your hunger is of a more mild variety, then perhaps simply spiritual support, like a good small group, a good prayer group that you can pray together, perhaps that will do it.

Let me introduce a proposal. Suppose we recognized that there's no real distinction between what we call psychological pathology and spiritual hunger (and I'll make sense of that later). Suppose we recognized that what we call psychological pathology really has to do with flesh dynamics, and that psychological pathology—what we've called psychological pathology—does exist but that we misunderstood it, and it really has more to do with a spiritual activity of the flesh-driven soul. And suppose we realized that there is a very real spiritual hunger in the image-bearing heart, and we were to take these two categories of pathology and hunger and bring them together and say, "It's a human being who's left home and we've got to find some way to walk with that person back home." Who's going to do that? The spiritual director as our culture now defines it? The psychotherapist as we've known him or her for years? Her whole new category of sacred companion, SoulCare, is a different way of approaching the difficulty of working with people who are troubled. It has more to do with bringing the soul home than with anything else. We'll look at that more carefully in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

Why is SoulCare not a neat and orderly process? What do you think of the current practice of spiritual SoulCare as you've encountered it?

In order to avoid the direction that secular SoulCare has already taken, Dr. Crabb desires to see three things happen to spiritual SoulCare in this century:

- “De-professionalize” SoulCare
- Nudge economics to the side
- Repersonalize SoulCare by putting it back in the church

How do you feel about each of these desires?

Imagine a church where you were part of a community of people who “journeyed together to God [and] that changed the way you lived.” What would such a church mean to you?

How would you define the varying roles of professional counselor, pastor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, spiritual director, and spiritual friend? Where do you fit in?

“Suppose we recognized that what we call psychological pathology has more to do with real spiritual hunger?” Who do you think would then provide care for severe, moderate, and mild problems?

Lesson 4 Study Guide

CC204

SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Beginning Steps in Spiritual Direction

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, we discuss spiritual directors. How do we become people that can provide spiritual direction to others?

When you complete this lesson, “Beginning Steps in Spiritual Direction,” you should be able to:

- Describe the characteristics of a community in which spiritual direction is practiced.
- Explain the three-legged stool model for the basis of spiritual direction.
- Identify the characteristics of a spiritual director.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Four: Beginning Steps in Spiritual Direction

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

Let me offer a radical proposal for how SoulCare could actually develop in the local church. Suppose we recognized that deep wounding to the human personality can create substantial internal problems, and of course that's true. But rather than thinking of psychological dynamics that need professional care, suppose we thought of flesh dynamics. And the difference is this: In psychological dynamics, an innocent self is coping as best it can, and needs and deserves support. But we have to ask a question: Does a biblical view of people ever allow for the idea of an innocent self being wounded? Or are we not depraved selves from the moment of conception, determined to make life work without God and, therefore, having our fist clenched in His face? And when we're wounded and bad things happen, our flesh pops up, and we say, "I'll find a way to make my life work." That's not an innocent self coping as best they can in the way that deserves our support.

"Psychological dynamics" presumes innocence. "Flesh dynamics" presumes that there's no such thing as an innocent self. There is, rather, a soul determined to handle life without God. If we thought like that, then SoulCare would begin to become a much bigger word. No longer would it have the idea of just somebody who prays together and reads the Bible together and says nice things to each other, but now would deal with all the internal wounding that we now think only psychotherapy can address.

Suppose also that we realized that depth discernment into the soul required an awareness of the Spirit's movement and the wisdom to encourage that process. Suppose we believed that people needed relationships where they felt safe enough to look into their own interior worlds, and relationships with people who had enough wisdom to enter their interior worlds, hear their story, and see what is really going on. Suppose, not only, we believed that depth wounding was the province of SoulCare, but depth discernment was something that SoulCare could provide. We could see the holy tension between flesh dynamics and Spirit dynamics.

Suppose we had available to us a person with the wisdom to move into our interior worlds and to surface the holy tension between flesh and Spirit and who understood the spiritual cycle through brokenness and repentance and abandonment and confidence and release.

If we understood all of these concepts and put them together, then my radical proposal is this: We could return SoulCare in its full-orbed reality and richness, to spiritual community, where spiritual friends provided a safe place to journey honestly, where every Christian had a companion for the spiritual journey. And we could see not only spiritual friends in spiritual community, but we could also see spiritual directors properly defined as men and women who provide wisdom to enter the darkest places in the human heart and to discover, to discern, and to encourage the release of the divine life within.

Not only a companion for every journey, but a guide for every search. I know it's a dream, but it's a biblical dream. And if that were to happen, then maybe we could redefine therapy and counseling and spiritual direction and spiritual support and bring all these good words under the rubric of one concept—true spiritual community, with spiritual friends who provided grace-filled, passionate relationships, and spiritual directors who were not professionalized, who were not living for economic advantage, and who were not de-personalized in their approach, but who could offer wisdom to those who were especially struggling in their journey to God.

If that were to happen, if my dream were to come true, then I believe the word *church* could become the most meaningful and exciting word in our vocabularies. How do we get started with that? How do we move toward the actual reality of SoulCare happening in our churches and our communities? How do you begin moving with all the material we've discussed in all these courses into providing actual SoulCare?

The first step in every journey is to know where you are and where you want to go. Where are we in our Christian churches? At the risk of overstatement, I believe it's fair to say that we are a collection of individuals who too often struggle alone. We're unknown. We're unexplored. We're undiscovered, and we're untouched. We've never turned our chairs toward one another. We've never meaningfully said, "I invite you to enter my soul in a relationship of SoulCare." We've never turned to another and said, "I would love to provide companionship for you and your journey." We've never turned our chairs. That's where we are, generally, in our churches. There are happy exceptions, but that's a general pattern. That's where we are.

Where do we want to go? Well, if you are like me, and you've thought this material through enough to perhaps come to a recognition of your own desires as a human being, then maybe you know what you would like to become. Maybe, with me, you would like to become involved in a community of broken but hopeful people, traveling together into the presence of God and there being changed and empowered by supernatural resources to go back into our worlds, not just staying in the monastic retreat where all we do is pray, where all we do is encounter God, but where we encounter God meaningfully together and then are empowered to go back into our worlds to love our spouses unselfishly, to keep our families together as best we can, to spend time with our kids, to feed the hungry, to provide opportunities for the poor, to hate sin, and to somehow manage to love the sinner, to proclaim what we believe humbly, and to wait longingly for heaven.

That's who we want to be. The community of the broken but hopeful who together travel to God and are changed to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and then to reenter our world, not to be of the world, but to be in the world as lights—that's where I'd like to be. That's not where I am.

The first step in every journey is to know where you are—individuals with unturned chairs—and to know where you want to be—a community who turn our chairs, discover our brokenness, and, in our brokenness, discover the reality of God, and it changes our lives.

Well, let me begin the planning for this journey by thinking through how we can find the wisdom we'll need to move from an interior world that has more in common with Adolf Hitler than Jesus Christ to an interior world that actually resembles the interior world of Jesus—that's what I want.

I want to do it with you; I can't do it without you. You need my SoulCare. I need your SoulCare. We need to come together and recognize that when we come together, we're a mess. Because, in the core of my being—find out what I'm like inside, and you will realize that it's no overstatement to say that I'm actually more like Hitler than I am like Jesus—but in the core of my being there are resources to be otherwise.

Can you touch those in me? Can you help me believe that they are there? Can you help me believe that in the core of my being Jesus Christ lives by His Spirit, and I can become like Him?

To put all this more simply, how do we provide spiritual direction for men and women on the journey through crisis and complacency and demanded comfort into the confidence and centeredness and unending consolation of God's presence? How do we move toward spiritual direction? How do we become sacred companions who provide spiritual direction?

I want to talk about spiritual direction first. Then I want to talk about spiritual friendship.

First, spiritual direction—a lot of overlap here of course. If we're going to begin the ministry of spiritual direction, dealing with depth woundedness, dealing with depth hunger and depth struggle, if we're going to become spiritual directors for the soul, then let's start by thinking vision. We've talked about that a lot. Let's think about vision.

What would a spiritual community with spiritual direction look like? Three verses occur to me as a way of developing vision. The first is in Proverbs 20:27, where the inspired writer says this: "The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being" (NIV). That's the interior world. There's something that God provides that is a flashlight that goes into the very deep recesses of my soul. There is something in us that God has placed there for the exact purpose of revealing what's happening at the center of my being. In other words, I really can know myself to a significant degree. Call it the conscience. Maybe call it what Paul called it in Romans, where he talked about the requirements of the law being written on every heart. What he's saying is that we can know at any given moment when we're heading and how we're heading in the wrong direction—in raising your kids or deciding what job to take or handling your spouse or working through other kinds of internal conflict. We can become aware of our sin. If we're going to provide spiritual direction, we need to have confidence that we're going to be able to discern the real problem, and the lamp of the Lord is available for the real problem to be revealed. That's the first thought.

The second thought in getting a vision for spiritual direction: When we enter into the deepest struggles in life—when we feel cheated, when life seems unbearable, when the pain is overwhelming, when we feel like things have gone badly and it's not fair and we're miserable and we don't know what to do; when a marriage falls apart or a child breaks a parent's heart or cancer strikes or a job is lost—then we can say, because the Bible tells us we can, "Yet (don't you love the word *yet*?) in spite of . . . yet, with all this going on . . . yet I am always with You, God. You dwell in the center of my being. Your home is in me. I'm in You, yet I am always with You, God, in the middle of whatever calamity I'm facing."

The psalmist goes on to say in Psalm 73:23-24, "You hold me by my right hand" as I navigate

through this storm. “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory” (NIV). With that verse in our minds—with those two verses in our minds—we can say with confidence that it’s possible to discern what is happening in us that’s causing all the trouble, but we can also discover from God how we can respond to this particular struggle. Aren’t you having a relational problem right now with somebody? Almost everybody is. There’s somebody that’s hurt your feelings. You’re not sure how to handle this, how to talk with this person. I’ve got that going on in four or five areas of my life I could talk about. And according to this verse, no matter where I am, God and I are together. I am in His presence, and He will guide me and make known to me how I am to handle this. So I can discover from God how I can respond in good ways to whatever might be happening in my life.

Add a third thought. Not only can we discover what’s wrong, not only can we discover the path back home, but John tells us in 1 John 2:26-27 that when we’re being led in wrong directions, the Spirit Himself is in us and will Himself guide us from within from a source of internal wisdom that is drawn from Scripture and that resonates in our hearts. So, therefore, John says in his first epistle, we don’t need anyone to teach us.

So God is actually going to speak to me from the center of my being, and I don’t need you to teach me, but maybe I need you to help me discern what He is saying in the core of my being. Maybe that’s spiritual direction. When God looked down on His foolish Old Testament children, He said in Deuteronomy 5:29, “I really wish” (I’m paraphrasing), “I really wish, I long that their hearts were inclined to fear Me and to keep My commands.” But they weren’t. So God arranged to give each of us, as His children, a new heart. He promised that in Ezekiel 36:26-27, where He said, “I’m going to give you a new heart, and I’m going to put a new spirit within you, and I will see to it that when you have this new heart, when you have this new spirit, you will be able to discern what is best. You will be moved to follow My decrees. You will want to follow My decrees and the recognition of what it means to walk My way. And the desire to go My way is something that will come from within.” This means something radical that a lot of Christians are uncomfortable with. It means this: Now, because of the new heart and the new spirit—that’s what’s in us under the terms of the New Covenant—now you can trust the deepest desires of your heart, because you will be delighting in God in the core of your being. That’s why when I talk to men with sexual addictions, and they are tempted to view pornography, my response is that the answer is not merely to resist the wrong direction, it’s certainly that, but it’s to indulge the deepest desire of your heart, which has nothing to do with watching pornography.

Now, if you followed all that, that means we have a three-legged stool, a three-legged stool we can sit on. It will balance, and we can be comfortable. A three-legged stool will give us the basis for talking about spiritual direction. That is what our topic is now. We’re thinking about how we can develop a spiritual community where SoulCare takes place that is not parceled out into psychotherapy and counseling and lay counseling and your own spiritual support groups and spiritual disciplines and spiritual direction—it’s not parceled out in all these ways. But we realize that way in the core of our beings, we don’t have soul pathology versus soul hunger. We just have a deep problem in our relationship with God. Our souls are deformed, but the power of God can reform them, spiritually form them. And we need companions in the journey in spiritual community. That’s what I’ve been saying.

And now we're talking about how spiritual direction can be a part of that. The three-legged stool on which we can build our model of spiritual direction goes like this: Leg number 1 (to repeat what I've said): We can know what's happening beneath the surface of our lives. At least we can know enough to develop wisdom for living well. You don't need to live in unending confusion. You don't need to ask yourself for the rest of your life: What's wrong? Why am I failing my spouse so badly? Why am I so involved in continual sexual addiction? Why is my anxiety overwhelming me? We can know what's wrong. The Bible tells us that. That's leg number 1, as we think about spiritual direction. It's possible to enter flesh dynamics and to know what's wrong.

Leg number 2: God Himself (we're told this in the Psalms), God Himself will let us know how we can move through any situation to enjoy His presence and to be changed. God Himself will illumine the path home. A spiritual director doesn't give you illumination. A spiritual director develops eyes to see the illumined path that God has made known, and then he encourages following on that path. So the second leg: God Himself will make known the path home.

The third leg of the stool: God is now in us creating desires that can be trusted, so that when I want to know the path home, the issue is not "Will someone tell me what to do?" The issue is to trust my heart: "You know, what I really want to do right now is to go to my wife and tell her I'm sorry. That's really what I want to do. It isn't that it's the right thing to do, and my therapist told me I should do this, and the Bible verse convicted me that I should. All that may be there, but it's what I want to do. It's the way home. I can trust my heart, because in the core of my being, my desires are holy." We don't need someone to tell us what to do. Spiritual direction is not direction in the sense of "do this." Spiritual direction is directing you to your deepest desires, because your deepest desires are from God.

We only need someone who can put us in touch with our new hearts, someone who understands Spirit dynamics and can help us to see them and feel them and experience our desire to release them. That person is what I call a spiritual director. In New Covenant terms, a spiritual director is the replacement for the wise man of the Old Testament. Think about that with me for a moment.

In the Old Testament, there were three categories of spiritual leaders. Jeremiah talks about this. In Jeremiah 18:18, there are three categories of spiritual leaders. There were priests who taught the law, priests who led public worship. There were prophets who spoke to the culture about their failures. There were prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel who came and said, "Israel, you are wrong at a national level. You are going in bad directions. I call upon you to repent."

There were priests who taught and led in public worship. There were prophets who spoke to the culture about failures and about their responsibilities. But there was a third kind of spiritual leader in the Old Testament days called a wise man. And wise men were people who offered counsel on how to live well.

The wise men in Israel's latter days in the Old Testament were exposed as people who weren't wise at all. The wise men had lost their wisdom, because they didn't listen carefully to the Word of the Lord. That's in Jeremiah 8:9. The Old Covenant wise person was to listen to God, not the culture. The Old Testament wise person was to spend time in the presence of God, not just to get a lot of training. The Old Testament wise person was someone who knew God so well that wisdom

came from God's heart and mind into their heart and mind, and they could go to other people and impart that kind of wisdom. And when they didn't spend time in the presence of God, they had no wisdom to offer.

In New Covenant days, which are now, we need wise people. We need wise people who will listen to God. And because they listen to God long enough and hard enough—in His Word primarily, but also in terms of their own journey through their hearts toward the presence of God—they have come to understand that a wise man in our culture is someone who understands where God is taking us, how God is moving us to become a people who bring Him glory, and how He is leading us home.

And wise people, secondly, are people who understand the resources that God has made available for us to get home. The new heart, the new purity, the new identity, the new disposition, the new power are all available. And a wise man or a wise woman is one who understands that and then enters our lives with this wisdom and can see the holy tension between all of the flesh dynamics and the deep wounding—in our childhood abuse and our parents' neglect and all the sad stories that people tell—and we can see how the flesh has been energized by all of this. We can see what is deeply alive in the person, and the wise man, the wise woman, sees that and exposes it to the individual so that the holy tension is felt, which then releases the cycle of spiritual growth.

That's what Paul did. Paul was a wise man. He said many things along this line. He said to people, "You walk in newness of life. You obey God as people who have been brought from death to life. You obey God as new creations in Christ Jesus. You obey God as people whose bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit." What Paul was saying is this: Discover who you really are in Christ and reveal yourself.

An old saint once said, "The key to spiritual growth can be put really simply: Love God, and do whatever you want." Because if you love God, what you want to do is exactly what God wants you to do.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." That is delighting in Him.

Look at the church today. What are the New Testament counterparts of Old Testament wise men? For this new model I'm wanting to create, I suggest that in our churches we need wise men, wise women. We need spiritual directors after the pattern of Old Testament wise people. Look at the church, and you'll see that we have pastors who perform oftentimes the functions of prophets. We have teachers and worship leaders who serve as priests before God, proclaiming truth and leading us into His presence in a corporate body. But my question is: Where in the church are the wise counselors? Where in the church are the wise spiritual directors—people who understand the human soul, who enter it, and who see the battle and know the available resources and stir up the holy tension that sets the spiritual cycle in motion? Where are the wise people?

As our culture becomes more accepting of the idea of spiritual direction, more and more schools are developing in spiritual direction, many of them wonderful and good. But may I suggest that rather than establishing more formal schools where men and women can be professionalized and

economically advantaged and taught to be a special class of elitist experts, perhaps another way to think about developing wise men, wise women, is in our spiritual community; so that people who are struggling with life and want great wisdom will know to go to, not a psychotherapist, not a highly trained spiritual director, but a wise man, a wise woman, a spiritual director who can enter the battle and see the flesh and the Spirit, and highlight the holy tension, and guide people through the process of brokenness and repentance, abandonment, confidence, and release. As wise people begin to develop that, we're going to have a true community.

But how do we get there? Training programs, well, they have their place. But may I make just a simple suggestion to you? If this is drawing your heart, if you see the need, and you feel God is calling you to be one of these wise men or women—not proudly, you feel inadequate, you're not sure if you have it—but you like thinking in this direction, you feel called of God, let me suggest a simple little pattern to follow.

Meet with a couple of other people who share your heart. Get two or three or four people together who feel the same way, who long to provide spiritual direction, who long to be equipped by God to be a wise man or wise woman. If you are struggling and hurting, this doesn't disqualify you; it qualifies you. If you're suffering, if you're failing, well, of course—get together with other people who are honest about their journey but long to provide spiritual direction. Pray long and hard about a sense of unique calling to this vital work.

First, get together.

Secondly, pray. Are you called?

Third, you might take this course on SoulCare together. You might get together and take this entire four-course curriculum on SoulCare and ponder the ideas and debate and dialogue and think.

Fourthly, read. Read together. Become a book club. Read books like Thomas Dubay's *Seeking Spiritual Direction*. Read books like Henri Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Read books like Theresa of Lisieux's *A Story of a Soul*. Maybe John Gorsuch's book *Invitation to the Spiritual Journey*. These are the kind of books you need to think about. Read books on the topics. Think about these things.

And in your group of three or four people, become a community where you seek to know, explore, discover, and touch each other. Pursue whatever training is available, not to be certified, but to become more aware and discerning. And as you meet, commit yourself with authority and sufficiency of Scripture, journey together honestly through the spiritual cycle, study New Covenant theology. Read Dwight Edwards' book *Revolution Within*. Reflect on what New Covenant community could look like. Read a book by Jim Kallam called *Releasing the Community to Become a Church*. [Editor's note: Dr. Crabb is referring to Jim Kallam's book currently entitled *Risking Church: Creating a Place Where Your Heart Feels At Home*]. Reflect on the nature of the journey. Read my book *Shattered Dreams*—how God matures people through suffering.

In the middle of all this, remember a key principle: You offer meaningful spiritual direction to people who are drawn to your life, not to people who recognize your credentials. Do you want to be a spiritual director? Let me ask it differently. Would you like to provide spiritual direction? Would you like to be the kind of person who people come to and say, “I’m away from home. I don’t know how to get back. Can we talk?” And you would say, “I’d love to.” Why? Because you’re qualified through training? Maybe, or maybe not. But you walk the path. You’re a wise man, you’re a wise woman, through study, through dialogue, through thinking, through reading, and now you want to walk with somebody else on the journey home.

Spiritual direction. Maybe it’s your calling.

Discussion Questions

If at times we are dealing with souls “determined to handle life without God,” how might this notion influence the way we provide SoulCare?

How can every psychological problem (excluding physiological problems) be a problem of the flesh?

Following are the three scriptural supports for Crabb’s three-legged stool model for spiritual direction. In your own words, summarize the three legs described in these passages:

- Proverbs 20:27
- Psalm 73:23-24
- 1 John 2:26-27

In view of the Old Testament, the New Covenant, and Paul’s example, what characteristics should a wise person have? To what extent do you exhibit each of these characteristics?

If you feel called to become a spiritual director, Dr. Crabb suggests some steps to take in order to discover your calling. Which do you plan to pursue, if any?

Lesson 5 Study Guide

CC204

***SoulCare Foundations IV:
Community—Where
SoulCare Happens***

The Rhythm of Spiritual Direction:
Following the Spirit as He Releases
Supernatural Goodness

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, we learn how to discern the movement of the Spirit in someone else's life and how we can tag along in that movement.

When you complete this lesson, "The Rhythm of Spiritual Direction: Following the Spirit As He Releases Supernatural Goodness," you should be able to:

- Recount the two distinctives of biblically based spiritual direction.
- Explain the concept of "the rhythm of release."
- Illustrate the concept of "the rhythm of release" in a practical example of spiritual direction.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Five: The Rhythm of Spiritual Direction: Following the Spirit As He Releases Supernatural Goodness

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

Let me give you two distinctives of biblical spiritual direction that set it apart from the many approaches to spiritual direction that don't really build on the foundation of the Bible. Distinctive number 1: Spiritual direction that is rooted in biblical theology and not merely tradition assumes that there is goodness in a regenerate person waiting to be released. If that's true, then the work of disciplining what is bad and bringing what is bad under control is best achieved through the passionate release of what is good.

We hear a great deal today about spiritual disciplines. That term is in. People are fasting and meditating and spending time in silence and solitude (wonderful things to do that I thoroughly appreciate, and I practice many of them myself), but too often I would suggest that what's happening is we're thinking of the disciplines as primarily a means to control the expression of our old nature. If we discipline ourselves in this way—the very word *discipline* suggests that—if we discipline ourselves in this way, then maybe we'll express our old nature less. Maybe the battle with sin will be won through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

But think of spiritual disciplines and think of the notion that there's a goodness waiting to be released in a very different kind of a way. A theologian named Richard Rohr described spiritual disciplines as an opportunity—now listen carefully to this—as an opportunity for under-stimulation. Spiritual disciplines are an opportunity for under-stimulation so that the distractions of coping with life would not keep us from discovering our desire for God, would not keep us from discovering the goodness that is within us.

Think of spiritual disciplines in the way Henri Nouwen talks about them, as a means of creating space for God to do His deepest work of drawing us into union with Himself. I would suggest, as we think about SoulCare and spiritual direction, that we must take into account the fact that the average Christian today sees his or her life more as a battle against sin than as a battle to discover, nourish, and release the new heart that's filled with passion for God. We're too often like the Islamic follower who knows what to do and strives against himself to do what is right. Muhammad, the prophet of Islam is reported to have said, when he came back from a war: “We have returned from the lesser war,” meaning a physical battle with an enemy. “We have returned from the lesser war to the greater war,” by which he meant the struggle against self.

For many religious, morally minded people, the spiritual journey is a battle against doing what's wrong. That's not the Christian way. Christian SoulCare, and particularly Christian spiritual direction, cares for redeemed souls by celebrating the good desires within, by believing that in the Christian pilgrim there is a fundamental goodness waiting to be released. That's the first distinctive of Christian spiritual direction, of Christian SoulCare.

When you're talking with somebody who's born again, who's a believer in Jesus, who's a follower in Jesus, you can count on the fact that there's something waiting to be released. You can trust what is inside the person at the core of his being.

That goodness, we must say very quickly, is not there in those who haven't received the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. And that leads to the second distinctive of Christian spiritual direction. A second distinctive as I understand it is this: Whatever inclination toward goodness that becomes apparent in the life of a non-Christian is false, and it cannot be trusted because it comes from the springs of self-centeredness. Only conversion to Christianity gives people a new heart. This is a radical sentence, but I believe what the Bible teaches: Without Christ, every act of kindness—no matter how apparently good, no matter how much sacrifice is involved, no matter how much it seems to outstrip what a lot of Christians do—every act of kindness, apparent kindness, coming from an unbeliever has no merit in the courtroom of God. It is no more meritorious, the Bible says, than filthy rags.

If you take these two distinctives of Christian SoulCare, they would lead you to the following conclusion: When you are caring for the soul of an unconverted person, everything you do is aimed at conversion. And when you are caring for the soul of a converted person, everything you do is aimed at release.

Now let me see if I can make that practical. We're talking about spiritual community, where SoulCare is practiced by spiritual directors. And then later we'll talk about spiritual friends. But for now, we're talking about spiritual directors—men and women who have a discerning ability, an unction from the Spirit of God to be able to see into the soul of people and recognize flesh dynamics and Spirit dynamics and see them both surface in a way that a holy tension is created. Tell me what that would look like in a person's actual conversation with somebody. Let me see if I can make this a little more practical.

You're providing SoulCare with somebody, and you're wanting it to be spiritual direction. You're wanting to actually guide them through the entire process of moving into the presence of God. You want to see them become broken, because they're not the person they were created to be. You want to see them repent of the fact that they prefer some source of pleasure other than Jesus. You want to see them abandon themselves to the supreme treasure that, in fact, is God, and to develop a confidence that as they pursue God, He will reward. He is no man's debtor. And you want to see a release develop of who they most truly are being given to other people. So all that's in your mind, as you're seeking to provide spiritual direction to someone who makes known his journeying reality and says in these words to you (something that I heard very recently from somebody for whom I'm providing spiritual direction): "Last night was the night from hell. I'm really not doing well at all. I don't even know who I am anymore." And the gentleman fell apart and wept like a baby.

So what do you do? Remember, I talked sessions ago about embracing inadequacy. It's not hard to feel inadequacy. It's hard to embrace inadequacy. But in the middle of knowing that you don't know what to do, you'd like to provide spiritual direction. Your friend is hurting. He's had a terrible night. He's feeling bad about his life. He doesn't know who he is. You're not getting all that's going on, but you're there for this guy. You want to provide spiritual direction. If you buy

into the two distinctives of Christian spiritual direction, then you're going to become aware that your passionate desire, as you're sitting with this man, is not to fix him, not to comfort him, not to advise him. Your passionate desire is to see the goodness, the new life in Christ that is in this man, come to the surface and be released. Now if that's your desire—because you believe in the distinctives of Christian SoulCare and the distinctives of Christian spiritual direction—then you're going to ask, “Well, so what do I do? What do I say next? How do I think about this? What happens in me? How do I proceed in talking with this man who is recovering from his tears, aware of the level of pain that I have yet to enter and understand?” Your great burden is that there's something within this person that is yet to be released. And you want to follow the flow of the Spirit of Christ as He moves into this person's soul to release what the Spirit has already put there. Call that the rhythm of release.

I want to introduce the concept of the rhythm of release, spiritual direction that joins the Spirit in following His movement so that you are part of the rhythmic movement of the Spirit that leads to the release of who this person really is.

As we think about the rhythm of release and how to interact with the person in terms of Christian spiritual direction, I'm going to assume that the basic model we've sketched several times now in the course of our presentations is in your mind. You're attending to your own interior world. You're thinking vision and so on, and you have all that in your mind. The roadmap is there. The picture is there, but you're in the moment, saying, “Well, what do I do?” Well, if the two distinctives of Christian spiritual direction are true—if there really is a goodness in the believer's heart that is not there in the unbeliever's heart—then that goodness can be viewed as an energy awaiting release; and the process of release has a rhythm that no spiritual director can control or manufacture or produce, but that a spiritual director can follow.

To help me move into the rhythm of the Spirit as I provide spiritual direction for this particular person, I find myself thinking in certain biblical directions. Christian spiritual direction is rooted in biblical theology, so I begin thinking in certain directions that occur to me that come straight from the Scripture. Let me refer to a couple of them. Here are some ways to think that will help you move into the rhythm of the Spirit's releasing work.

I often think of the words of Isaiah 35:5-7, where the prophet says that the day is coming when “the eyes of the blind will be opened.” And I think of that and I go, “This man is blind to something.” He's feeling nothing but pain. He doesn't know who he is, but the New Covenant tells me he has an identity in Christ that, if realized, would bring him a deep sense of settledness, a deep sense of stillness, a deep sense of stability. This man's eyes have been opened by the Spirit, but he still isn't seeing. “The eyes of the blind will be opened. . . .Lame people will leap like a deer.” My brother is lame. He's not able to move in the life of his family and his friends and his job. He has no idea who he is. He's unable to move, and I start thinking, “But God said that the lame will leap like a deer.” That's in my mind. He goes on to say that “water will gush forth in the desert” and “the burning sand will become a pool.” If ever there was a metaphor for the soul in distress, it's the desert or burning sand.

My friend was sitting there, as I chatted with him recently, feeling nothing but deep pain. His soul was not an oasis. His soul was a desert, nothing but sadness. And he was like a fish trying to swim

in hot sand. So I thought about that passage in Isaiah 35, and then my mind went to Jesus. Many years later He announced that the time Isaiah prophesied was now present. You recall what Jesus said. He came to a group of people who were involved in religious routines that meant nothing to them, and He stood up and said to them in a loud voice: “If anybody here is thirsty, here’s what I’m inviting you to do. Come to Me. And if you’re tired of going through religious motions, if you’re tired of meaningless church every Sunday, if you’re tired of meaningless quiet time every morning, if you’re tired of meaningless family devotions every night, if you’re tired of religious rituals that have come to mean nothing to you, then My invitation is: Leave behind all the meaningless trappings of religion, and come to Me. And if you come to Me in the way that I’m directing,” Jesus said, “then I promise you that from the desert of your soul, water will gush forth.” And no matter what circumstance you’re facing, no matter what pain you’re going through—as I listened to my friend talk about his not knowing himself and struggling with a night from hell, whatever that means—no matter what you’re going through, no matter what your life is like, no matter what emotional struggles you’re facing, you actually can become like a fish swimming in an ocean, no longer swimming in the hot sands of the desert.

And I thought, “Is the Spirit moving him toward this—what Isaiah prophesied and what Jesus announced as its present reality?” I sat before a person who very clearly had a choice. This person was facing a fork in the road. There was a choice this person had to make. And I put it to myself this way (a little more biblical material): Either this person can seek to find his way home out of the desert into the pool, away from emptiness back to fullness—either this person can find his way home, coming by way of Mount Sinai, where the law was given, or he can come home by way of Mount Zion. If he comes to the mountain where the law was given, then he’s entering into a religion of requirement, where he’ll be required to control his impulses to resist doing what he wants to do in order to receive the blessing that he wants. He’ll be required to do something in order to discover himself. He’ll be required to handle his difficult night more effectively. He’ll be required to sort through all the emotional distress and find some way to find sense out of it. All that’s coming to Mount Sinai, and the result will be that the desert will remain the desert.

But he has another choice to make. And I’m sitting here thinking about my friend who is weeping, and I’m saying, “If this man were to come to Mount Zion (in his mind, perhaps a meaningless phrase, in my mind, from Hebrews 12), if this man were to come to Mount Zion where grace is available through the New Covenant, then he’ll discern not a religion of requirements, but, rather, a religion of relationship, and he will discover his freedom not to control his deepest impulse, but to release his deepest impulses to do what he most wants to do.”

I want you to listen to me read from Hebrews chapter 12, the passage I’ve been referring to. Let me read verses 18 to 24, and you ponder these thoughts as you think about moving into the rhythm of the Spirit’s work as you provide spiritual direction for your hurting friend. Listen to what the writer of the Hebrews said.

Verse 18 of chapter 12, “You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm.” He’s talking about Sinai. “You have not come . . . to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned,’” the voice had said.

Have you ever been in a position where you're just sick and tired of more exhortation? Do you sometimes not go to church because you don't want to be scolded one more time? You don't want to be told one more time, "Here's what you must do to get right with God. Here's what you must do to get your life straightened out." These are the commandments, and you've heard them again and again. It just gets piled on top of your back. You're failing, and you're looking for rest. Come to Mount Sinai, and your experience will be exactly that. The pressure will mount. The Bible goes on to say the sight was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

You won't find the rhythm of release by standing before the law. You won't find the rhythm of release, you won't encourage a person to move in the rhythm of release as a spiritual director by coming up with what he must do, by coming up with where he's failing and straightening him out. That's not going to lead to release. That's not part of the rhythm of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what it means to come to Mount Zion in the next few verses. "But you have come," the writer says, "to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,"—the pressure's off—"to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" [Hebrews 12:18-24 NIV].

Can you hear the contrast?

I'm sitting there talking to my friend. His face is buried in his hands. He's sobbing. "I don't know who I am. Last night was awful." And you're thinking, "There's a goodness inside of this person, and I want it to be released." The goodness is there not by his own merit. It's a gift of God. It's a new heart that God has given to him in the New Covenant, and you want to find some way to join the rhythm of the Spirit in encouraging this man to journey into the presence of Mount Zion, to move away from Mount Sinai where there's pressure to figure it out and get it right.

"I know I'm doing something wrong. What are the biblical principles I should follow? Larry, help me. Tell me what I'm failing at. Maybe I've not handled my background properly, and that's why these bad things happen to me. Can you sort that through and provide me with psychotherapy? Can you straighten all this out?"

Is there a whole different approach? My suggestion is, yeah, I believe there is. And it's the rhythm of release. What's that look like? Let me describe how it works.

When a Christian begins to speak, when your friend begins to share with you that he's hurting, a Christian spiritual director will make a huge assumption. He will assume that at that moment the Holy Spirit is working. And he will listen to the flow of passion coming out of the person's soul.

Either what is coming out of this person's soul is coming from the flesh and is moving this man away from home, away from God; or the passion that is coming out of him is coming from the Spirit and is moving him toward God. If he's moving out of the power of the flesh, you can count on the fact that the Spirit is there whispering, saying, "There's a better way. There's a new way. I want you to move away from Sinai, where there's pressure. I want to move you toward Zion, where

there's rest." You can assume that. Your friend says to you, "Last night was the night from hell. I'm really not doing well. I don't even know who I am anymore," and he begins to weep.

Something clearly is moving in this man. The rhythm of movement in his soul has begun and is now evident. So you follow the rhythm. Now just think what this means practically. The person's talking, and you're thinking, "There's a rhythm. He's moving out of his flesh, away from God, a bad rhythm. And if that's happening, the Spirit is saying, 'No, no. Come this way.'" There's another voice speaking within his soul; you can count on that, because goodness, the Spirit of God, is in his center, and you want to hear the voice of the Spirit and follow His rhythm in moving him away from Sinai to Zion. And so as he's talking, and you listen.

You wait. You don't try to fix or advise. Folks, can I tell you one of the great problems with spiritual direction is that we talk way too much? You sit quietly. You don't try to fix anything. You don't come up with advice. You don't even come up with soothing words: "My, that must feel terrible." You simply listen, and you're tuning in to your own soul. Where is the flow headed? You don't know.

So you listen, and at most you might encourage continued movement without attempting to change direction. You might say something as simple as this: "Whatever happened last night seems related to your internal confusion about who you are." And the man says, "Yeah, I think it is." You've given him a little prod, as you're looking to join the flow of what's happening within his soul. You're not changing direction yet. You're just joining in the direction, and he says, "Yes, I think it is," and he tells you what happened.

And you listen, as the man talks, until you sense—and this will be hard to grasp now, let me say it slowly—as the man talks with passion, you listen until you sense the passion in the man's voice lessening.

You've all talked to people who have begun by saying, "Man, things are terrible, and I'm really hurting," and they cry and they talk, and you just listen. And they talk for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. And after a period of time, their passion seems to lessen. The tears get a little bit less. That's your opportunity to start moving in a new direction. You can make an assumption that when the passion is getting less, it's because the deeper concerns of the soul are at that point not being addressed. There's something going on in this man that he's avoiding, that he's not talking about, and you're going to want to reframe to get into where the passion really is. What I often say to people when I'm chatting is: "You know, as we've been talking for the last ten minutes, I felt like your passion has decreased. You've been talking about something with the level of eight or nine or ten on a scale of one to ten of passion. Where are you now?"

And the person would say, "Well, three, I guess." And I would say, "What could we talk about that would reach a level of eight or nine or perhaps even ten?" You discern broken rhythm by tuning in to your own internals that say, "Well, I'm getting bored with what he's talking about. There's something that's being missed." As long as the initial rhythm continues, you listen, providing safety for him to be known, to share whatever he wants to share. You lead him nowhere. You simply receive. You create a safe space. But when a passion wanes, when rhythmic moving in a direction is broken, that's when you have the opportunity to reframe. That's when you say

something like: “You were telling me about your job problems and your insecurities surrounding your job. I sense that there might be other things you want to bring up that you feel even stronger about than what you’ve been already sharing.”

“Well, now that you mention it, I guess there are a few things. I didn’t know they were relevant, but, yeah, I can feel something inside of me stirring up a different topic.” You’ve reframed. And the person says, as my friend said to me, “Well, my mother’s coming for a visit, and my visits with my mother never go well.”

When he says that, you have just reframed. He’s now entering the story of his soul, the story of his relationships, and now you have an opportunity to more clearly think vision. How would the Spirit lead this man to relate to his mother? How is the way he’s relating to her affecting his wife? Is his wife seeing the way this man is—weakly, perhaps, or angrily—relating to his mother? And is she disturbed by all that? And you’re thinking, “All that’s part of the flesh, and I want to see how the flesh is operating, how things could be different. And I want to begin to notice that the Spirit is talking to him about his mother, and how he feels strongly about how he relates to her, and things are not good there.”

You know in the core of your soul, as his spiritual director, that he wants to do whatever God wants him to do, that he will recognize what is best and respond internally to a godly plan. And he’ll be able to say, “Yeah, there’s something that I would love to do differently, and the way you’re talking about my relating to my mom—that’s a little different than I thought of, but something inside of me stirs,” as you present the vision to him.

So you listen to his story. You continue listening to his story. With your categories of understanding, you begin to explore flesh dynamics. What happened in his life with his dad? What happened in his life previously with his mother that somehow seems significant, that became for him a moment of defining decision? He continues, “I can recall the time when my father told me that he could tell I was mad.” (I’ve used this illustration before.) “My father said, ‘I could tell that you’re mad, but you’re trying to hide your feelings, but you’re unsuccessful.’ And my father walloped me in a very significant way, and I made a decision that I would never allow myself to feel anything that could get me in trouble again.”

Knowing that people are fallen and knowing that people, therefore, handle wounds and protect themselves with their own resources, you say to him, “You know, when that happened, when your dad walloped you—because you were showing anger that you couldn’t hide—what happened inside of you at that moment?”

And this gentleman responded very firmly and said, “Well, I made a decision, and it was strong.” You could almost feel the fist clenched in God’s face. “I made the decision. I’m going to see to it—I can handle my life. No one is ever going to be able to tell that I’m feeling something they dislike. I have committed myself to only feeling what people will accept. And I have become the nicest guy in the world, and I think the emptiest person in the world.”

The rhythm in that man’s soul is moving toward death. So you create a holy tension by speaking to his new heart. And you say something like this: “The effect of your decision to feel nothing that

if revealed would get you in trouble—the effect of that decision is to keep your wife from knowing you, to keep anybody from knowing you. The effect of that decision is to keep who you most deeply are from being released on behalf of the kingdom. You are now living to ‘play it safe’ with your mom, which makes your wife feel very unsafe with you. Is that an accurate observation?”

When you say that, his response is: “That’s what I’m doing, but I really don’t want to do that.” At that moment, the holy tension has begun. Now you’re following the rhythm of release. You’re believing there’s something in this man that wants to go a different direction, and so you continue waiting, following behind the Holy Spirit until the man says, “I really need to handle Mom differently.” To which you respond, “You need to, or you want to?”

And he goes, “Yeah, that’s really right. I really want to handle Mom differently.” And I suggest to you that that’s SoulCare through spiritual direction—said very simply in terms of following the rhythm of the Spirit and moving people toward a holy tension that begins the release of Spirit dynamics toward the vision of who this person can be.

Because this course is centered in SoulCare, that’s our real topic, and because the SoulCare of spiritual direction is really a topic best discussed in personal supervision, I want to shift our attention now to the other half of SoulCare—spiritual friendship.

Discussion Questions

Rephrase the two distinctives of spiritual direction in your own words.

What are two ways that spiritual disciplines encourage spiritual formation?

How might seeing the battle against sin as a “release” help you to more effectively provide spiritual direction?

Why is it so important to listen rather than to talk when providing spiritual direction?

How do you help set up a holy tension in your friend’s life?

Lesson 6 Study Guide

CC204 ***SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens***

Spiritual Friendship: Pouring the Passion
of Christ From Your Heart into Another's

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, we discuss the ministry of spiritual friendship. Dr. Crabb discusses a theological foundation for why spiritual friendship is one of the most vital ministries in the church.

When you complete this lesson, “Spiritual Friendship: Pouring the Passion of Christ From Your Heart into Another’s,” you should be able to:

- Define spiritual friendship.
- Contrast spiritual friendship with spiritual direction.
- Discuss a biblical, theological foundation of spiritual friendship.
- Explain what it means to receive the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Six: Spiritual Friendship: Pouring the Passion of Christ From Your Heart into Another's

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

Some of you have listened to the last two presentations, in which I introduced the idea of spiritual direction, and you've said to yourself, "This is exciting. I love thinking this way. Maybe God has called me to the ministry of spiritual direction. My soul seems wired to think and to talk and to relate in these ways."

There are others of you who've responded very differently. Some of you have been saying to yourselves, "This is just way too confusing. I'd like to relate more simply. I'd like to relate more directly. I don't want to be thinking about Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, and I don't want to be thinking about rhythm. I just want to 'be there' as a normal person. Is there a place for me in this whole matter of SoulCare?"

You may be saying, "Look, I'm just a simple guy that likes to enjoy people. I like to get to know people. I enjoy getting close to people. I like to have fun with people. I want to be uplifted by people. I want to encourage my friends when life is rough. I don't think that's what you're talking about, Larry, in terms of spiritual direction. Is there a place for me in this spiritual community idea?"

If your reaction is that second one, if that describes you, then I want you to hear me say very, very clearly that perhaps you're called to the vital, powerful, deeply significant kind of SoulCare that is spiritual friendship. There is a distinction, I believe, between spiritual direction and spiritual friendship, and I don't believe every Christian is called to spiritual direction in the sense of which I'm using the term. Certainly all of us offer counsel, wisdom, and advice at given times, but maybe there is a category of Old Testament wise man that now, in New Testament, New Covenant, realities can be called a spiritual director. Maybe you're not called to that. If you're not called to that, if all of this different kind of thinking doesn't really appeal to you—you just want to relate to people because you love them and want to be a good Christian brother or sister—then maybe you're called to the very high calling of spiritual friendship.

The difference as I see it between spiritual direction and spiritual friendship, please hear me carefully, is not one of depth. This is not like the difference between a nurse and a doctor. The nurse can give an injection but the doctor does the surgery. That isn't the case. I believe that every form of legitimate SoulCare reaches deeply to the center of the human soul. The difference between spiritual direction and spiritual friendship, as I understand it, is one of intention, not a difference in depth. Let me explain what I mean.

Spiritual direction seeks to provide wisdom for someone who is confused about a journeying reality, and it provides the wisdom to see into the operation of flesh dynamics in a relationship where godly passions in the director stir spiritual dynamics in the seeker. Follow all that?

In spiritual direction, the job is to provide wisdom for someone who is confused about a journeying reality. “This is going on in my life. I’ve no idea what is happening.” And the spiritual director is one who provides the wisdom to be able to see into the operation, many times a subtle operation, of flesh dynamics and is able then to stir up the Spirit dynamics by providing a relationship where what comes out of the director actually arouses the appetite for God in the seeker.

Now, that’s what I mean by spiritual direction.

Spiritual friendship is different than that. It may include some of that. It may blur with my definition of spiritual direction, but spiritual friendship can be defined a little bit differently. Spiritual friendship I would put this way: Spiritual friendship purposefully offers Christ-like passions to another that releases the mystical presence of Christ, and it releases the mystical presence of Christ in the moment of interaction. That presence mediated by the Spirit of Christ stirs the life of Christ in both people so that they move a step closer to union with God. Now that’s a mouthful. I want to say it again, and I want to say it slowly and comment on the different parts of that rather lengthy definition.

Spiritual friendship: our topic as we begin the last several lectures dealing with SoulCare in the body of Christ amongst spiritual friends. Let me define spiritual friendship a little more slowly and a little more carefully.

First, spiritual friendship purposefully offers Christ-like passions to another. Just stop with that first element of the definition. Spiritual friendship purposefully offers Christ-like passion to another. Now think back to what we’ve covered before. Think back to what it means to provide safety through the celebration of no judgment. Because there’s grace, I’m not going to judge you; you’re safe with me. You can tell me about your worst failure, and I’m not going to give up on you. I’m not going to back away from you. I’m going to celebrate the grace that’s powerful enough to handle your worst problem and your worst failure.

Now think back on what it means to what I’ve discussed before, that when somebody shares their journeying reality, not only is there a celebration of grace and a safety that you provide, but you feel an excitement and an awe over what the Spirit has done in this person through the New Covenant—that when a person shares their worst struggle, something in you gets excited. Folks, that’s unnerving. When a spiritual friend gets excited as someone shares his problem, there’s a surprise element that the one who is sharing says, “Can you help me with this? I don’t understand why you’re so excited. I’m telling you, I’m in the dumps and things are terrible.”

I may have shared with you before that Brennan Manning, a well-known spiritual director, provided me with spiritual direction. At one point when I made known to him how I was struggling with something that was really ugly, he began to cry in the middle of our spiritual direction session. I remember thinking, “I’m going to have to help him out. I’ve got to turn therapist for

him. He's weeping over there." And I realized what it was that was going on. I said, "Brennan, what were you crying about?" And Brennan said, "Oh, Larry, every time I'm with you, I'm so drawn to Jesus."

And I remember thinking, "I just told you how awful I am. How on earth does the fact that I'm awful, that I'm doing some really bad things and struggling with bitterness and some ugly internal realities, and I'm making this known to you, and you are over there weeping for joy and being drawn to Christ? Brennan, I don't get it." I was so surprised.

And Brennan said, "Well, Larry, it's just so obvious to me that you hate anything that separates you from the Lord you love."

And I remember going, "You know, I think that's true. How about that?" I was so friended by that man and something in me stirred. Why? He was excited about what the Spirit of God was doing within me. He was celebrating. He was excited. And to present yourself to another with the moral purity that comes from always judging yourself more severely than you judge another—when you're talking to a spiritual friend, and they're giving you these kinds of passions, there's a celebration of grace. You feel safe. There's an excitement that makes you aware that God is at work and there is a purity within them that says, "Look, you're not the bad guy here. I'm just as bad, if not worse, and I will never criticize you without first criticizing myself, because there's nothing you've ever done wrong that, at least in principle form, I haven't done just as badly." The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Spiritual friendship purposely offers Christ-like passions to another: safety, excitement, moral purity, and a humility that provides discernment to see deeply in the soul. Spiritual friendship purposely offers Christ-like passion to another, and it releases what is spiritually alive within the other, because it has the power to restore the soul of another. Do I really believe that when the Christ-like passions are coming out of me, it really can be like the cheerleader on the side of a marathon race handing a cup of cold water to the runner halfway through?

Do I really have that power, not because I'm so wise as a spiritual director, but do I have the power to give you a cup of cold water because I give you the passions of Christ? And when you experience that the pressure's off—that I actually am for you; I believe in you; I'm excited about you—when this comes out of me, something in your soul responds with: "I think I can finish the race now."

Spiritual friendship purposefully offers Christ-like passion to another. That's the first part of the definition.

The second part: That Christ-like passion actually releases the mystical presence of Christ in the moment of interaction.

I want you to get hold of this. I want you to realize that when two Christians or more get together, and when they get together and release something of who Christ is with the agenda of Christ, something mystical happens that's invisible to the natural eye, but can be seen and felt with the eyes of faith.

Remember what our Lord said in Matthew 18. After talking about how to handle relational tensions, after talking about forgiving people and wanting to be restored to people, after talking about tensions in the body of Christ, then He said this: “I want you to know this, disciples, that when you gather in My name, even if it’s just two or three of you, when you gather in My name and when you relate together on the foundation of Who I am—on the foundation of where I’m going, on the foundation of the resources I’ve provided for Me to go where I intend to go—when you relate on the basis of My name, then I want you to know something: You won’t see Me, but I’ll be there. I, Jesus, will literally be in your midst. Literally—not bodily, but literally. I will be in your midst; that’s a promise.” That can be very simple. I ran into a friend at the coffee shop the other day, and he asked, just typical conversation, “How are you doing?”

I knew him well enough to say, “Well, I wasn’t doing well when I got up this morning, but I spent some good time in Matthew. Matthew 18 has kind of restored me a bit.”

His response was: “I’d love to hear. What did you see?” And we spent the next maybe five minutes, no more, discussing the passage in Matthew 18, and by the time this little conversation was over, I was very aware that in that five minutes in the coffee shop, something mystically alive was there. When he walked away and said, “Larry, it was good chatting with you,” and I said, “Nate, it was great chatting with you,” there was something in me that was more alive because two were gathered in the name of God and Christ’s presence was there.

I’d left that five-minute conversation with a little more energy to worship God as the center of my life, and I felt privileged to enjoy a moment of spiritual friendship.

When you gather in His name, when Christ-like passion is actually released, the mystical presence of Christ is promised in that moment of interaction. And that presence, as my definition continues, is mediated by the Spirit of Christ, which stirs the life of Christ in both people so that they move a step closer to union with God.

When we come to Mount Sinai, we keep our distance from God. When we come to Mount Zion, the blood of Jesus opens a new and living way into the actual presence of God. So what I’m wanting you to hear is that spiritual friendship is an incredibly high calling, because it has the power to bring our personalities into glad dependence on God and a deep enjoyment of Him that energizes us to resist sin in our lives and to love better. That’s SoulCare.

So maybe you’re not cut out for spiritual direction and, if so, that’s just fine. Maybe your mind likes abstraction more than concrete things, so maybe you aren’t cut out for spiritual direction. Maybe you enjoy contemplative engagement with other people and thinking hard about all that is happening in their soul, and you want to get involved in all the dark realities of the person’s life and find out where the brightness of Christ is shining. If that’s the case, then perhaps you were cut out for spiritual direction, but maybe you’re not. Maybe you’re more inclined to just draw close to people, to enjoy them—to hear their stories and just be there for them and with them, doing whatever you can to encourage, and my sense to you is, if so, wonderful. You’re likely called to the wonderful, powerful, crucial form of SoulCare that is spiritual friendship.

Maybe you're not the kind of person that takes great pleasure in reading books like Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castles*. Maybe you're more interested in reading a thoughtful novel and getting together with friends to discuss a more current work of literature.

Those of you who are called to the ministry of spiritual friendship, my sense is . . . may your numbers increase. If I had the power to populate with more spiritual directors or with more spiritual friends—hands-down decision—I would go for more spiritual friends. If I were granted my fondest wish, I would want a spiritual community where everyone in the entire community was a spiritual friend and was enjoying relationship with a spiritual friend, and I would also want to see spiritual directors available to all who sought out that kind of interaction.

I would love to see a man or woman who was ministering in the way of spiritual direction available to every fifty or hundred Christians, but I would love to see everyone available in spiritual friendship.

With that introduction to spiritual friendship, let me start thinking a little more carefully with you about the ministry of SoulCare through spiritual friends and again recognize that this is for everybody. Those of you who are more drawn to spiritual direction should remember this: You will be effective in offering spiritual direction only to the degree that you are enjoying spiritual friendship.

Another way of putting it is this: If you are called to the ministry of spiritual direction, make sure you're hanging out with people who simply know you and enjoy you for who you are.

I'm in a strange position of being involved in spiritual direction a fair amount, and I love chatting with people at the levels of their interior worlds and thinking about mine and that's—I kind of get off on that, I really enjoy that. If I did it all the time, I'd go nuts.

I've got to hang around with people who don't look at me as a spiritual director. I've got to hang out with people who look at me as somebody who, after a meal, sometimes makes a funny noise. I've got to hang around with people who see me telling the same joke ten times, 'cause I've forgotten I've told them nine times before. And people just kind of laugh at my weaknesses and frailties and just enjoy me for who I am.

If I'm not involved in comfortable spiritual friendships, then the result will be I'm going to take my spiritual direction far too seriously, and I'm going to see myself in a rather elitist capacity. That's a terrible, terrible mistake to make.

See, I want to say to all you spiritual directors: Be involved in spiritual friendship. And I want to say to all of you who are called just to relate and enjoy people in the body of Christ: Take seriously your high calling. It's not spiritual direction in the narrow sense of the term, but it's equally important.

What I want to do in the last few minutes of this presentation is . . . I want to begin to offer a biblical theological foundation beneath the idea of spiritual friendship. I want to take the idea of spiritual friendship and go beyond the notion of “hang out with people and have a good

time, watch a football game, and just enjoy yourselves and call that getting together as friends.” Those are social conversations. Those are valuable, but SoulCare conversations that represent your opportunity to offer spiritual friendship have a higher purpose. And I want to lay a biblical theological foundation for what you can do, what I can do, as a spiritual friend. Let me do it this way.

I referred earlier to a passage in Matthew 18, and I want to read that passage to you now. I want you to listen carefully as I read the words of our Lord, the passage I read a little bit of before. Listen to what our Lord said in Matthew 18:18-20, as we think about laying a foundation, theologically, beneath the concept of spiritual friendship.

“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” [NIV]. If two of you agree, it’ll be done. And where two or three come together in My name, My promise, as I mentioned earlier, the mystical presence of Christ, will, in fact, be there.

Now, think with me about that passage a bit and see if we can come up with a way of understanding spiritual friendship. That’s what we’re heading toward, so stay with me as I ponder this passage.

The wording of verse 18—wording that confuses a lot of Christians and confuses me too, many times—is all about Christians binding and loosing on earth, and then when we do that, and God binds and looses in heaven whatever we loose and bind on earth—that wording is parallel to what our Lord said in Matthew 16:19. And in that particular passage Jesus, talking to Peter, says, “Peter, I’m going to give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And because you will have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whatever you bind on earth”—same language now as Matthew 18—“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

What’s He talking about? And what does this have to do with spiritual friendship? Stay with me.

Whatever our Lord means when He says, “I’ve given you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind, whatever you loose, we’ll do the same thing in heaven . . . Where two or three are gathered, I’ll be with you. Whatever you agree on, it will be done for you.” Whatever He’s talking about in this whole difficult passage, one thing is clear: He has conferred the power of the keys on all of His disciples and not just Peter. Because in Matthew 16, when He says to Peter, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven and with the authority of those keys, whatever you loose and bind on earth will be loosed and bound in heaven,” the exact same wording is given to His disciples in saying that “I’m assuming that you too have the power of the keys, because you twelve disciples of Mine, you also have the same power.” So whatever He means, it wasn’t limited to Peter. It was given to every member of the body of Christ.

Now what that means is this: You and I—when you lead in your small group—you have the power of the keys. The question is: What does that mean?

You have the power of the keys. What is our Lord talking about when He says that the power of the keys belongs to you? Well, remember this, when you think about keys in the Scripture, when the Lord said, “I’m going to give you a key,” He’s talking about giving you a particular kind of an authority. He says, “I’m going to give you the power of the keys, and you’re going to have a certain kind of authority, and it’s something that I will give you.” He says in Matthew 18, “I’m not giving it to you now, but I will give it to you,” by implication, “at Pentecost, when the Spirit comes and indwells you. You’re going to have a power that you didn’t have before.” And He makes the promise immediately after He declares, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

He’s saying here that the word *church*, referring to a group of people—a group of followers of Jesus—when they get together, the purpose for which they gather can never be defeated. “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not be able to hold in the life that I put into My church. You have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever you decide is going to come to pass; and when you get together as a church, I’m going to see to it that your purposes, when you gather in My name, are purposes that will be realized.” Therefore, understand this—and this should be a great encouragement to you when you get together in a small group—if you get together and know what it means to exercise the power of the keys, if you get together and know what it means to meet in Jesus’ name, then the purpose for which you gather is guaranteed to be realized.

You can have something happen in your small group; that’s a promise from Jesus. Now the key, as I mentioned before, in ancient Near East culture, was a symbol of authority, and Jesus says that it’s the authority in the kingdom of heaven; it’s the authority to live a certain way now, to live as followers of Jesus. And whenever you decide—that this is bound, this is forbidden, this is loosed, this is permitted—whatever you decide, that you know if we’re going to, in our Christian community, get to know Jesus better, we’re going to have to agree on this. We’re not going to allow this to go on here, or, we are going to allow this to go on here—whatever you decide as a group of Christians gathered in the name of Jesus is useful for the purposes of spiritual formation. God is saying, “I’m going to bless that,” if your fundamental purpose is “I want to live like Jesus.” If your fundamental purpose is “I want to spiritually form; I want to live as a member of the kingdom of heaven,” then I have the power of the keys, and what we agree to do together as a group to move in that direction, God will bless it.

What I hear Jesus saying, to summarize all that I’ve said, is this: “I will give authority to My followers in their spiritual lives to no longer be bound by rules and regulations but rather, because of the life that I will put in them, to deny themselves whatever is not good and to allow themselves whatever furthers the kingdom in their lives.”

When you and I get together in the name of Christ, we follow the internal promptings of the Spirit. And when we agree on anything that comes out of our desire to know God better, then it shall be done for us by the Father. Where two or three spiritually alive people gather in order to spiritually grow, Christ is there releasing His life in us and through us, and when that happens, we’re experiencing *church*.

Folks, church is all about followers of Jesus getting together to know Christ better and to become more like Him, and when we agree on a way that that can happen in our small group, in our

church—when we agree on a way that that can happen that flows out of Scripture—all of heaven will devote its resources to see to it that our goals of becoming more like Christ are reached. With those thoughts in our minds, listen again to our definition of spiritual friendship.

Spiritual friendship purposefully offers Christ-like passion to another that releases the mystical presence of Christ in the moment of interaction, and that presence—indicated by the indwelling or mediated by the indwelling Spirit of Christ—stirs the life of Christ so that both people (or all three or ten or one hundred) move a step closer to union with God. That's spiritual formation. There's a theological foundation for spiritual friendship. I have the power of the keys. You have the power of the keys. The two of us get together, and we agree that if we're going to move toward spiritual formation, we're going to meet on a regular basis. We're going to read our Bibles. We're going to share our stories. We're going to explore our flesh dynamics. We're going to develop a vision for each other. And when we agree on things that come out of the Scripture, that makes sense to us given our purpose for spiritual formation, what I believe Jesus is saying is, "I'll be there to bless your spiritual friendship. You hang in there long enough, and the purpose of your spiritual friendship will be realized."

You and your friend—the two of you, the three of you, the four of you—will move toward Christ-likeness. Folks, there's a power to spiritual friendship that Jesus promises us in those passages in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18.

Now I want to build on that quickly said and simply stated theological foundation, to make the idea of SoulCare through spiritual friendship practical. How does it work? What do we do? We'll look at that in our next lesson.

Discussion Questions

What's the difference between spiritual direction and spiritual friendship?

After reading the description of spiritual friendship, how do you feel about providing that form of SoulCare?

Why should spiritual directors be involved in spiritual friendships?

How might Dr. Crabb's insights drawn from Matthew 16 and 18 affect your spiritual friendships with one or several people?

Lesson 7 Study Guide

CC204

***SoulCare Foundations IV:
Community—Where
SoulCare Happens***

The Sacred Journey: Where Control is Lost,
Where Good Dreams Shatter, Where God's
Agenda Looks (and Feels) Bad

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, we discuss how being honest about life's journeys can help us to be prepared for meaningful spiritual friendship.

When you complete this lesson, "The Sacred Journey: Where Control is Lost, Where Good Dreams Shatter, Where God's Agenda Looks (and Feels) Bad," you should be able to:

- Discuss the qualifications of a spiritual friend.
- Evaluate your own ability to see life realistically.
- Make three observations of the spiritual formation journey that will prepare you to be a better spiritual friend.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Seven: The Sacred Journey: Where Control is Lost, Where Good Dreams Shatter, Where God’s Agenda Looks (and Feels) Bad

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

I recall chatting with a friend, a struggling friend, who said to me, “You know, things were really going pretty well until about fifteen years ago.”

And I asked the rather obvious question. (Sometimes SoulCare isn’t very complicated.) I said, “What happened fifteen years ago?”

And he looked at me, with no attempt to be funny or sarcastic, and said, “Oh, that’s when I got saved, and ever since then, let me tell you, it’s been a mess.”

If we’re going to move toward a revolution in SoulCare, if we’re going to really change the way we think, the way we live, and the way we relate as spiritual friends and spiritual directors, then I suggest we must become very painfully aware of a difficult fact. The difficult fact is this: We no longer live in Eden. There’s no way back in. And when you know Christ, when you get saved, as my friend got saved and his troubles began, when you get saved, you can’t help but have higher hopes that make you more aware of lower realities.

No friendship, no marriage, no small group, no church will ever work especially well. I’ve been married for thirty-five years, and I think I’m coming to understand that. I really thought after thirty-five years of marriage to a woman I deeply love, who for some miraculous reason loves me too . . . We met when we were 10, had our first date at 12, got married at 21. Folks, we’ve been together a long time. Why do we still have conflict? I really thought we’d be over all that stuff by now.

You never outgrow your need for spiritual encouragement through spiritual friends. Life doesn’t really get easier. I believe—and this is my testimony—it does get better. It gets richer. There are deeper experiences of joy, but it doesn’t get easier. People continue to get their feelings hurt, to feel inadequate, to be insecure. Egos continue to block intimacy. Fear and laziness keep us relating at a shallow level, and lots of tough things will happen that will rock our community. That’s the way it is.

And if we’re going to enter the world of community to provide spiritual friendship, then we’re going to have to begin by understanding that. We’re also going to have to realize that when we get involved in the way life really is—as opposed to pretending that it’s better than it is or different than it is—our qualifications to offer spiritual friendship may be very different than what we think.

My wife struck up a conversation recently with a young man spending a week at a spiritual retreat center. I was there as well, and we were there with two other couples. The other two men were just like me: clinical psychologists, writers with some degree of “platform,” some degree of recognition. The three of us, as clinical psychologists, were there in this group. But my wife happened to strike up a conversation with a young man who sensed in her—not in me and the other two psychologists—the fragrance of grace. He went to her and said, “Could I—could I talk with you?” SoulCare began.

He made a journeying reality known to my wife, who is one of the most effective spiritual friends I know. He said to her, “I was homosexually raped last night, and I don’t know who to tell. Can I talk to you about it?” And because my wife exuded the safety of grace in a way that apparently we highly trained psychologists didn’t quite pull off, he went to her. And I think he made a very, very wise choice.

I believe that my wife’s involvement with him as she made known the passions of Christ—she didn’t judge him, she didn’t back away, she didn’t get so discouraged that she couldn’t deal with it—the thought was: Look, what’s happened is awful. Isn’t grace something? Let’s deal with this in terms of a community involvement. She made some recommendations as to who he needed to chat with, and she intervened and got involved. And I believe that—and this will sound like overstatement to some of you—but I believe that because of the soul friendship she offered this man, she may have saved him from a psychotic break, from a terrible, terrible thing happening.

The thing I find most amusing is that God could have chosen one of three psychologists, but he chose my wife. Why? She was far more qualified. She’s a marvelous spiritual friend. You too can offer that kind of spiritual friendship regardless of your training, regardless of your ability. Are you a person in love with Jesus? Are you a person who is filled with the Spirit? Are you a person who loves people? Are you a person who reflects the character of God to others?

Opportunities for SoulCare arise in the middle of our difficult lives. And of course there are many difficulties in life that make SoulCare a regular necessity. We no longer live in Eden, and there’s no way back to Eden, because Eden’s not our home. But there’s a way forward to our true home, which is in the fellowship with God that is available to us that was never available to Adam and Eve. We think back on Eden as the perfect place. No. There’s a better place: the presence of God from which we can never be cast out, no matter what sin is committed. There are difficulties in life, but there’s always reason to move forward into the presence of God.

Life really doesn’t work very well. Relationships don’t work very well. But that rather dismal sounding fact—what a way to begin a presentation, to cheer you up, with how bad life works—that dismal sounding fact can be turned to spiritual advantage if you and I face up to the difficult nature of this journey through life, and the fact that the difficulties will only continue and likely get worse until heaven. If we admit how discouraging and faith-squelching life can sometimes be, then we can discern the deeper purposes of God in the middle of the difficulties. Quite clearly, God’s purpose is not to remove difficulties until heaven. God’s agenda is to draw us into a deeper relationship with Him in the middle of the difficulties. SoulCarers providing friendship have incredible power to move into people’s lives to accomplish the purposes of God.

The revolution in SoulCare that I envision, that this course is all about, the revolution I envision where people are known, explored, discovered, and touched, where there is dependence on New Covenant resources, where there is a movement toward fellowship with God and enjoyment of God and our appetite for God is aroused—all that's possible, but it's not going to happen if you and I as spiritual friends somehow think that right living before God guarantees comfortable living from God.

Suppose my wife made the assumption that if you live right, bad things don't happen. Then when this young man shared the horrible assault made on his body and soul the night before they chatted, when he made known this terrible event, my wife would have had no choice but to judge. That would have had to be an assumption: that bad things don't happen to good people, so because this bad thing happened you must be a bad guy. Tell me what you did wrong that would result in this kind of atrocity happening to you.

But rather than that, because my wife has an accurate understanding that we are no longer in Eden and that our desire to follow Jesus only makes more disturbing the fact that life is difficult and is not conducive to following Jesus, gave her the opportunity to move into this man's life when a very difficult part of life was made known to her.

Hear a very simple thought, and if you get this one thought, you'll get the whole point of this lecture. Spiritual friends join people in their lives as their lives actually exist. So many people are sitting in church in a congregation of hundreds, sometimes thousands, looking cheerful. They are friendly people whose manner of relating communicates to all those who look at them: My life is going fine; hope yours is too.

The standard greeting of all of us—you all know what this is, you go to church, you go to ball games, you go to parties—the standard greeting of all of us is to say, “How you doing?” And the standard response is, “Doing great. How about you?” May I suggest that we have become largely a community of pretenders more than a community of the broken? I can't tell you how many times people have said, “How ya doing?” And I say, “Fine, thanks.”

I'm not sure if it's wrong to say, “Fine, thanks,” if you're passing in the hallway and have five seconds to interact, but maybe it's not true that “I'm doing fine, thanks.” And the question is: Is there somebody who knows that we're outside of Eden and nobody is doing as fine as they want to be doing? That everybody has something in their lives that if they were to share with a spiritual friend could move them into a closer intimacy with God.

But because we become a community of pretenders, we have, therefore, become a people of false hope. When you pretend that life is better than it is, that your life is better than it is, then you become a people of false hope, where you say, “Things will get better. Yeah, they're tough right now, but I know things will work out because God loves me. Life will work out. I just have to figure out what I'm doing and what I'm doing wrong, and when I start doing things right, then things will get better. Praise God, I know He's faithful.”

But when we admit that we're out of Eden and when we admit that a lot of our problems began when we became Christians, when we admit that when we became Christians, the Spirit of God

indwelled us and began whispering to us, “Here’s the path of life,” and we become aware that there’s something else in us that goes in a very different direction—when we become aware that sometimes we hear about a friend who is doing well in an area that we’re not doing well (we just lost some money, they just made some extra money), when we hear about their good fortune, something inside of us gets jealous and petty, and we pretend we’re happy for them, but we’re not. When we start admitting these kinds of things and become the community of the broken as opposed to the community of pretenders, then maybe we give up our false hope that the day will come before heaven where I’ll never feel jealous again, that the day will come before heaven where I’ll never get resentful or feel insecure or judgmental, that the day will come before heaven where lust will no longer be a problem, that the day will come before heaven where I will be everything I long to be. You give up the false hope, and you gain the real hope.

And the real hope is this: You and I can get together in relationships of SoulCare. You can—you and I, because we hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven. If we agree to pursue certain avenues of spiritual formation, if we agree to prohibit activities that get in the way, if we loose and bind on earth, then God will loose and bind in heaven, and Christ will be with us—present with us, saying, “I know the journey’s long. I know you’re still a mess, but let Me tell you, in the core of your soul you’re terrific, you’re beautiful. I love you. Keep on going. The day’s coming.”

That’s our hope, not the false hope of “Everything will be fine, and I’ll become so mature that I’ll have no more struggle with sin.”

To help us join others in this difficult journey in this life to God, to help us join others as spiritual friends, I want to explore with you in this presentation the nature of the spiritual journey. Get saved at your own peril. Now don’t misunderstand. I recommend getting saved. I recommend you come to trust Christ as your Savior. The difference is heaven and hell. But when you choose to follow Christ, expect difficulties. Expect the fact that “you’re out of Eden” to become more apparent than it ever was before.

I want to make three observations about the nature of the journey, which will help us, I believe, in becoming better spiritual friends as we journey with other people.

Three crucial observations about the nature of the journey. Let me just tell you what they are. They won’t make a great deal of sense as I read you these observations, but then let me discuss each one separately.

Observation number 1 about the nature of the journey: Our journey through life is not governed by the law of linearity. It is governed by the law of liberty. Our journey through life is not governed by what I call the law of linearity. (I’ll explain that term in a bit.) But it is governed by the law of liberty. That’s the first observation.

The second observation about the nature of the journey is this: that lesser dreams, even good ones, must shatter to awaken our appetite for greater dreams. This has tremendous implications for how you’re going to be a spiritual friend to somebody who just got a divorce, whose child just developed cancer, whose ministry just fell apart. How do you become a spiritual friend to somebody whose dreams have shattered? We’ll think about that in a few moments.

The third observation is this: that when we say God is in control—and I believe the Bible says that, so it's true—when we say that God is in control, the comfort we draw depends on understanding that He is controlling our circumstances to accomplish an agenda that we might not always like. To say He's in control does not mean life will go well, as we define *well*. To say that He's in control means that He is orchestrating all that happens toward an end point that we don't always properly value.

Three observations about the nature of the journey. Let me look at each one a little more carefully.

Observation number 1: The journey to God is governed not by the law of linearity, but rather by the law of liberty. Let me discuss that.

When I was diagnosed with cancer a few years back, many wonderful friends prayed, and I'm grateful for every prayer that was offered. Even to this day, as I travel, people will sometimes say, "How is your health?" And by the grace of God, it's good. I'm grateful for that, of course. And many will say, "We've been praying," and I'm always grateful. I'm always moved by that, and I'm grateful that God has chosen to answer the prayers of His children on my behalf.

But one time I was talking with a friend who said, "How's your health?" And she knew about the battle with serious disease, and I said, "Um, all the tests are good. Apparently I'm cancer free." And this friend, a good friend, a wonderful friend, smiled broadly and said, "Well, of course. We prayed about it." That's the law of linearity. A law that assumes that there is a linear, a straight-line relationship, between an A and a B. "We desire for Larry to be healthy." And I'm glad my friends want that; I want that. I like being healthy. Do I pray about it? Of course I do. But the law of linearity assumes that there's a goal that God will always honor other than my spiritual formation. When two people agree on a goal as they gather together in the name of God, and their goal, because they are gathering together in Jesus' name, is the goal of honoring Him and becoming more like Him, and they are able to say to Him, "God, we want whatever's going to bring You the most glory; that's the first thing. That's what we're after. And, God, our friend has cancer, and if somehow You want to get more glory out of that by allowing him to die from this, then we submit to it, because our first thing is You. But our second thing is we'd love if this man's cancer would be entirely cured. Please God, do that for us." There's no linearity there.

There's no guarantee. But when my friend said, "Well, of course you're better; we prayed about it," he was living (both he and his wife said it), so he and she were both living, as I understand it, according to a law that is not in effect.

The journey with the Spirit to God doesn't operate on a linear basis. It's right to pray for restored health, and sometimes God answers that prayer, as He has in my case to this point, but it's not a linear relationship. There is no A that is always followed by B.

I wish there were. We have two sons. I've mentioned before that when my sons were born, there was something in me that was determined to be the best father in the world to make sure these kids straightened out, to make sure these kids walked the straight and narrow, to make sure they were going to be godly kids, and I was determined—because I want this journey to be orderly and predictable, now hear what I'm saying—I wanted it to be under my control.

I can recall once, when I got bad news about a friend who had just divorced his wife and renounced Christianity, that I turned to both of my boys after family devotions that evening—they were 6 and 8 years old—and I remember literally doing this—I’m ashamed, but I did it—I remember wagging my bony finger in their faces and looking at them both and saying, “You two will live for God, and I’m going to see to it.” The journey just doesn’t work that way.

I remember my older son was about, I guess, 8 years old when I said that, and he kind of sat back and sniffed and said, “I might. I might not.” What was he saying? (He really said that.) What was he saying? “Dad, you’re not in final control of me.” I think he was saying something very wise as it came out of his image-bearing reality. “I’ve a choice to make, and you don’t control me.”

I prefer for linearity to be in place, because it would restore control to me, but the law of linearity doesn’t govern the journey. The journey is, rather, governed by the law of liberty, which I simply define this way: No matter what’s going on in your life, you always have the freedom to draw near to God. Whether you’re dying of cancer or walking out of the hospital healed; whether you’re walking out of the divorce court that you never wanted to be in, or whether you’re celebrating your anniversary of fifty wonderful years of marriage; whether life is awful or life is terrific, whatever’s happened in your life, you always have the liberty to draw near to God, and when you draw near to God, in His timing and His way, He will draw near to you. That’s liberty. The law of liberty allows me to draw near to Him as the first thing.

Implications for a spiritual friend: SoulCare is not about helping someone to figure out how to handle their friends and their career and their health to see to it that life works better. Spiritual friendship is not about organizing life so it goes the way it should. SoulCare, spiritual friendship, is about joining someone to walk together into God’s presence, to mortify flesh dynamics and to vivify Spirit dynamics, so spiritual formation can progress no matter what’s happening in this unpredictable, nonlinear world. If you understand that the law of linearity is no longer in effect, then you will realize that you have no business as a spiritual friend worrying about fixing people. Don’t fix them. Join them in the law of liberty to walk in the presence of God. Observation number 1.

Observation number 2: Lesser dreams, including good ones, must shatter to awaken any appetite for greater dreams. When our children were born, I was determined to get it right. I was determined to see to it that my dreams for a happy, godly, responsible family were realized. I have many friends who dreamed that same dream and worked perhaps far harder than I as a father, were more faithful in devotions, more faithful in prayer, more faithful in good, consistent discipline, more faithful in being involved with their children, and things have not turned out the way they had hoped. Many times you have to go through shattered dreams to realize the law of linearity no longer applies. And sometimes, lesser dreams, even good ones—like godly children, like a wonderful ministry, all second things; the first thing is always nearness to God—sometimes lesser dreams, even legitimately wonderful dreams, must shatter. Why? What is it about the nature of this journey, which means that sometimes dreams simply have to shatter?

Maybe dreams—good dreams, but lesser dreams—must shatter, not only to help us lose confidence in our ability to make things happen—because we have none; without Him we can do nothing—maybe lesser dreams must shatter, not only to help us lose confidence in our ability to make things

happen, but also to help us look higher. To find the abundant life—the nature of this journey . . . What’s the abundant life? Well, list the twenty top blessings you want. Good health, good kids, good family, good money, good job, good ministry. That’s the abundant life. Maybe that’s not right, and maybe some of these dreams that are legitimate must shatter in order to arouse an appetite for something that’s higher, because maybe we’re satisfied with too little.

How did C. S. Lewis put it? We come to God and ask for a nickel, when He wants to give us a million dollars. We come to God and ask for good health, good kids, good family, good money, good ministry, and He says, “Folks, that’s a nickel, maybe a dime, maybe a quarter. Let Me give you a billion dollars. Let Me give you a zillion dollars. I want to give you Me.”

And our response is: “Well, I’m not interested in that, I just want a good life.” And He says, “No. The good life is Me. This is eternal life. ‘This is the abundant life,’ Jesus said, ‘that you might know God and Jesus Christ who sent Him.’”

I discuss how all this works in my book *Shattered Dreams*. And one of the major points that I make in that book is this: When God seems least responsive to your pain, He is doing His deepest work in you. When God seems like He is doing the least that He could possibly do, when it seems like a good friend would do so much more, and He’s not doing anything in terms of your difficulties, your struggles, and life is going from bad to worse to worst; maybe when He seems most distant, He’s actually most present. And maybe He’s doing His deepest work of drawing you into the whole point of life to value Him as your supreme treasure.

Suppose you’re caring for the soul of a friend whose spouse has left for another partner. A spiritual friend holds the confidence dearly that God is deeply at work through this awful time. The friend offers no judgment when the deserted spouse gets furious with God or loses interest in life, but rather looks intently into the person’s heart to discern what the Spirit is whispering. There’s no superficial comfort like, “Hey, things will work out okay. You’ll meet somebody else, and you’ll have a great marriage, second time around.” There’s no superficial comfort like that, nor offensive advice along the lines of, “Well, maybe you’d better figure out what you did wrong to cause this marriage to fail, so next time you can do better.” There’s none of that. That’s not spiritual friendship.

Maybe the spiritual friend says, “You know, sometimes when lesser dreams die, the Spirit is whispering, ‘There is something more that you want.’”

Recently, I talked to a young woman who was newly divorced, and as she thought about shattered dreams and began to realize that God is awakening an appetite in her for Him that she never had before, she said, “I’m still not sure I’m very thankful for the divorce, but I can see that in the middle of that I’ve been awakened to what my soul wants more, even more, than a good marriage.”

As long as we’re satisfied with the blessings of life, we’ll not energetically pursue more deeply intimacy with the Blessor. A spiritual friend moves into somebody’s life who is suffering, with a confidence that God is moving them toward their highest, greatest dream.

Observation number 3, very quickly. When we say, “God is in control,” we must ask, “of what?” And the answer is this: God is in control of a divine agenda that we don’t always properly value. And that divine agenda, and I’m repeating myself now, that divine agenda is the Emmanuel agenda. A spiritual friend is one who looks at another who is struggling, who is hurting, who is fussing with life where things are tough, and is able to say, “God’s control does not guarantee you comfort, but God’s control guarantees your spiritual formation. God’s control does not guarantee you a good family, but God’s control guarantees intimacy with Him.” And the response sometimes is: “That’s not what I want.” But the spiritual friend knows that’s exactly what you want, and they patiently wait for the Spirit to make that clear to your heart.

Spiritual friends will, therefore, provide SoulCare that, number 1, doesn’t try to figure out life so we can make life better. That’s not spiritual friendship. That’s secular friendship.

Secondly, spiritual friends don’t simply grieve when life falls apart. Of course they do that, but they don’t stop with grieving. They discern the desire for God that survives the worst calamity.

And spiritual friends, thirdly, don’t glibly say, “Well, God’s in control, so things will be fine.” They rather say, “God’s in control, so His purposes for you will be realized. You’ll draw near to Him, and you will be like Him.”

Spiritual friends will walk the journey as it really is outside of Eden into a far better place, into the home where God is alive in the deepest part of our souls.

Discussion Questions

Why is it biblical to believe that life doesn't get any easier but it does get richer?

What's a more important qualification for spiritual friendship than training and ability?

Why is it important to spiritual friendship that we admit how "discouraging and faith-squelching life can sometimes be"? Why do pretenders have false hope?

To what extent do you need to move from the community of pretenders to the community of the broken?

Dr. Crabb makes three observations about the spiritual journey:

1. It's not governed by the law of linearity, but by the law of liberty.
2. Lesser dreams (even good ones) must shatter to awaken our appetite for greater dreams.
3. To say that God is in control means that He is moving all things towards an end point that we don't always properly value or even like.

How does spiritual friendship help a person work through this process?

Lesson 8 Study Guide

CC204

SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Real Church: Two or Three Broken People
Agreed on One Purpose

Updated 2015



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Objectives

In this lesson, we will discuss the kinds of spiritual communities in which SoulCare can naturally develop. Four key elements can define a rich church experience that will allow SoulCare to become a reality.

When you complete this lesson, “Real Church: Two or Three Broken People Agreed on One Purpose,” you should be able to:

- Describe three characteristics of a church where a community of SoulCare can effectively develop.
- Recall the four key elements that define a rich church experience, one that helps release our deepest longings and encourages a greater level of SoulCare.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Eight: Real Church: Two or Three Broken People Agreed on One Purpose

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

Sometimes I wonder if a revolution really is possible. Is it happening in my life? The revolution I'm speaking of is a revolution where our desire for God—to know Him intimately and to enjoy Him supremely—actually becomes stronger than our desire to fix our problems, than our desire to have our kids turn out well, than our desire to have the biopsy come back negative, than our desire for our marriage to go well, than our desire to be less lonely, than our desire to have a good ministry. That all these legitimate desires actually become secondary, nudged aside by an overwhelming and consuming appetite to glorify God—that cliché becoming a reality is the revolution that I have in mind.

Can that really happen? If it is going to happen, it seems to me that the word *church* has to come to mean something very different than it often means in our culture. The word *church*, I suggest, for the revolution to happen, must actually come to mean a group of Jesus' followers who talk meaningfully to each other as they move toward God. Church must become primarily a community of spiritual friends who worship together centrally and who relate to each other meaningfully. We have a long way to go.

We need, and it's possible, to develop a healthy environment. It's possible to develop the kind of a church where SoulCare really could develop and become the norm as opposed to the exception. It's possible to develop, I believe, a kind of church community where we don't pass the buck and say, "If you're struggling, see someone else," but, rather, "Maybe there's something within me (because the living Christ dwells within me), maybe if we have a cup of coffee together, maybe if we start relating together, maybe if our small group develops in certain ways, then maybe your appetite for God and my appetite for God could become so strong that it'll crowd out everything else."

If that's going to happen, the word *church* must come to mean something very definite. There must be a healthy environment for SoulCare to develop. So I want to devote this presentation to the word *church*.

Recently I was speaking to a man whose life was going reasonably well, but he was confused by what was happening in his life. Things were going fairly well. His marriage seemed stable. His kids were doing fine. His job was going okay. He was involved in a pretty good small group, and life was the good Christian life for him. And after several years of his struggle with pornography being less of a factor, for reasons he had no understanding of, the struggle began to come back, and he found himself powerless to resist it. He didn't understand it.

And as we were chatting about the recently developed struggles and their new strength coming back again, as we were chatting in a SoulCare conversation, the man said this to me: “You know, I haven’t made it to church for several months, and frankly I haven’t missed it. Something in the idea of going to church just doesn’t appeal to me. It just seems so irrelevant to sit in the pew and sing a few hymns and drop a buck in the collection plate and listen to a sermon and hope that it goes well and maybe raise my hands or clap my hands or maybe sit there with my Bible open. All of the things that the word *church* means to me, it just seems so irrelevant.”

Well, I’ve heard the argument, and I agree with the argument that Christians should go to church being more interested in what they give rather than in what they receive. We’re not consumers when we go to church. When I go to a restaurant, I make a decision. This meat was good, and the service was great. I’ll come back. Or, things were cold. The meat was chewy. The service was terrible. I’ll never go back there again. I’m a consumer in a restaurant. Most of us carry that mentality into our church experience, and I agree that’s a mistake. I agree that we can worship God for who He is no matter how badly our lives are going, that the issue of relevance is not supreme. The issue, rather, is God’s glory, and I can come together with God’s people, and I can worship, and I can have the power to love even when my life is going badly, so I can give to others as well as give to God.

And that’s a reason for going to church, and I agree with that. But, frankly, that argument doesn’t do much for this man, and it’s missing something for me as well.

I’ve also heard the argument that might be given in response to this gentleman’s statement: “Why bother with church?” I have heard the argument, and I agree with this as well, that demanding relevance is a form of narcissism, that when you say, “Well, the church didn’t speak to me; my pastor doesn’t speak to where I really am, and the service seems so irrelevant,” you’re really saying that everything in your life, including church, needs to revolve around you. And that’s a mistake, obviously. That’s wrong. I don’t want to support that for a moment.

C. S. Lewis made the comment, and I agree with him as well, that Anglican liturgy was attractive to him because it called him to join a communion of saints larger than himself. And I like liturgy, frankly, for the same reason.

Philip Yancey wrote a wonderful little book called *Church: Why Bother?* Well, that’s the question my friend is asking, and I’m not sure if the answer of “Don’t demand the church be there for you, and don’t be a consumer; rather, go and give” (which I agree with), and the answer of “Well, get over your narcissism and be there for others; don’t be so self-centered all the time”—although both are novel arguments—I’m not sure if they quite do it for me, and I’m not sure if they respond to this gentleman’s burden when he says, “I’m struggling with something, and going to church just seems so irrelevant.”

Church, why bother? Well, I asked that question, and my answer for both my friend and for me is not to find a church with music that moves me, although I sure like it when it does. Not to find a church with sermons that speak to me, although that is a huge plus, and I appreciate my pastor when his messages seem to be anointed directly into my soul. Nor is my answer to simply tell my friend, and myself on occasion, to stop all my selfish whining about relevance and go instead to

worship God, because we're told to and that's our job. I believe exhortation like that has real merit, but that's not my answer.

What's my answer to: *Church, why bother?*

"My struggle with pornography," my friend said, "is back, and church just seems so irrelevant to sit there for an hour." Why bother? My answer is this: Define more carefully, and by that I mean more biblically, what the word *church* means (and be willing to climb mountains and swim oceans and cross deserts to find what the word *church* really means, and get involved), and my suggestion that I hope I make clear in this presentation is: When the church is defined biblically and carefully, you will climb mountains, you will swim oceans, you will cross deserts to be involved in what God had in mind when He instituted the church.

Writer Annie Dillard expressed her amazement that so many followers of Jesus strolled into church on Sunday morning the way they strolled into a theater Saturday night—dressed in their finery and smiling happily and enjoying the process. Annie Dillard suggested it would be far more appropriate, if we understood what church was all about, to come to church wearing a crash helmet. Because we're preparing to encounter the Lion of heaven who, like Aslan, is roaring His way through history accomplishing His purposes, moving through the jungle where all the beasts are out to kill Him but on a victorious march and inviting His followers to join Him. When you encounter the living God, you would be better placed to have a crash helmet on your head than the latest fashion.

Church is not a place, Dillard reminds us, to comfortably worship or to simply dance with emotional high. It is not a place to hear a nice talk that lets us say, "My, what a good sermon," or, "Well, I think the pastor's views in that passage were a bit off." Church is something very different than that. Church is a community of people who are doing battle against their worst enemy by coming boldly into the throne room of God, absolutely abandoning themselves to whatever He wants to do to them, in them, and through them, abandoning themselves to whatever the General wants to do with His soldiers so that the battle is won—the central battle against sin in their own hearts—and then moving out into the world to represent Christ well.

Going to church is more akin to wheeling yourself into surgery than to attending a good play. The key to recovering a biblical doctrine of church, I believe, is contained in a passage we've already mentioned in earlier presentations, where Jesus said, "Three gathered in My name is a community, where I will show up. And when I show up, you better have your crash helmet on."

That passage implies small groups where people know each other, where their true agendas are more visible, where you can't hide in the large group, where their lives are an open book. I've a good friend who says, "I can't imagine worshiping in a room full of people I don't know. It would lose a lot of its meaning." And these people then who come together because they know each other—maybe small groups who come into the large Sunday morning celebration and don't know, of course, the five thousand other people who are there, but know well the ten people they sit together with in the back corner of the building—worship together with their small group. And they gather in Jesus' name, and that means they gather for the central purpose of honoring Him, for the central purpose of pursuing His purpose in their lives, which includes moral purity.

They gather for the purpose of depending entirely on the resources that the Spirit of God makes available to move in the directions that their hearts most want to move.

Listen to a wise old Bible commentator who reflected on Jesus' promise to be in the midst of Christians as they gather in Jesus' name. Lyman Abbott, many years ago, commenting on that passage in Matthew 18, said this, and I quote: "Later theology has contrived no better definition of a church than this verse affords: The gathering of Christ's disciples, united in Christ, and with Him in their midst." And then he adds, "Observe that neither here, nor anywhere else in the Gospels, is there any implication that His being in the midst of such an assembly is dependent upon any church order, ordained ministry, apostolic successors, special rites, ceremonies or creeds, or anything of the kind."

What I hear Rev. Abbott saying is that a group of Jesus' followers who gather together to move toward God and to become more like Jesus, whether it happens in a group of a thousand people on Sunday morning or in a group of two or three at a coffee shop, is the church.

If you would ask me, "Larry, did you go to church last Sunday?" change the question to: "Did you go to church last week?" Because when you say, "last Sunday," you're implying that church is limited to the Sunday morning experience. If you were to say to me, "Did you go to church last week?" I believe that, biblically, I could answer and say something like, "Yeah, I sure did, had a wonderful time in church."

"Tell me about it."

"I met a good friend in a coffee shop to discuss our journey toward God. I went to church last week, had a great cup of coffee, had a great conversation with a good friend."

For many, that kind of gathering is more church than sitting in a pew for an hour on Sunday morning. Where there is no SoulCare, there's no church. Where there are no sacred companions to walk together to God, there's no church. Where there is no spiritual community with spiritual friends and a sprinkling of spiritual directors, there is no church. Church is not defined by a building that meets from 9:00 to 10:30 on Sunday morning. Church is not defined by the choir, by the robes, or by the guitars and other instruments. Church is not defined by the man or the woman who stands behind the pulpit and opens God's Word and teaches. That's a part of church, a legitimate part of church, but it's not the essence of church.

We're only the shadow of a church—a counterfeit many, many times—a shadow of church that is no more real than a picture of food handed to a starving man. Please don't misunderstand me. Am I saying that the large gathering Sunday morning cannot be part of what it means to participate in the community called church? No. I'm not saying that at all. Sunday morning can be a vital and meaningful part, and the question, "Church, why bother?" when it's addressing the Sunday morning experience, can have a very strong answer. I want to give the strongest answer I'm aware of as to what could happen on Sunday morning that really could be a legitimate answer to the question: *Church, why bother?*

The Sunday morning experience, if it exhibits four characteristics that must be modeled, assumed, taught, and openly discussed . . . if these four elements are there on Sunday morning in the worship experience (in what we normally call the church experience), then I believe that the Sunday morning event can legitimately and wonderfully be called church. And if they were present, I think my friend and I would drive a hundred miles to get to this place.

A friend of mine, Pastor Jim Kallam, has written a book called *Releasing the Church to Become a Community*. [Editor's note: Dr. Crabb is referring to Jim Kallam's book currently entitled *Risking Church: Creating a Place Where Your Heart Feels At Home*]. Jim pastors a sizable church of about 1,500 people, and he has wrestled hard with the question that we're asking: Why would honest strugglers bother to walk into a building on Sunday morning and sit in the middle of one thousand people, sing some hymns, hear a sermon, and go home? What can he do as the leader of this church? As the pastor, what can he and the other elders, other leadership, do to see to it that Sunday morning provides an experience that becomes an integral part of SoulCare and not something irrelevant to what church is really all about? How can Sunday morning become a rich experience of Christians gathering together as Christ's disciples with Him in their midst?

Let me borrow from his thinking. In the book *Releasing the Church to Become a Community*, he suggested that a true Sunday morning church experience, where crash helmets are more appropriate than the latest fashions, will clearly and consistently reflect four defining elements—four characteristics that define a church that has become a community. As you hear me discuss these four elements, you'll realize that you've heard the words before in these presentations, but I want you to understand that when I've talked about these four words, I've had in mind more the experience of one person sitting with one other person or maybe a small group. What Jim is talking about and what I want to borrow from his thinking is how to take these four elements with which you're already familiar and to think about them at a corporate level.

The mission of the church that reflects these four elements can be put very simply, and this is how Pastor Jim Kallam puts it for his church. In his mind, the mission of the church is a place—number 1—where people are stirred by the study of God's Word, where something happens in their souls because God's Word is being spoken. He's present through His Word to His people. Element number 1: Church is a place where people are stirred by the study of God's Word.

Element number 2: Church is a place where they struggle well with life (and the word *they* implies a togetherness), where there is a recognition that the nature of the journey, as we discussed recently, is one where dreams do shatter, where life is not predictable, where God's being in control doesn't guarantee everything you want. And so there are struggles that continue, sometimes devastating struggles, sometimes unexplained struggles, like the return of pornography addictions after several years of seeming to have it under control.

What does it mean to struggle well together? Church can be a place where the atmosphere is created that people know that here's a community where we can struggle well together with life as it really is.

And thirdly, it's where people serve each other. I would add "in relationships of SoulCare." Three elements where people are stirred: In the study of God's Word, element 1. Where people struggle

well together with life, element number 2. And where people serve each other in relationships that centrally include SoulCare and obviously include lots of other wonderful ways of service.

The foundation for all of this and for any biblical church, of course, is the Bible. Permission is given to face life honestly with all of its hardships, and people are willing to face life honestly because the entire mood of the church is one that clearly communicates a confidence that the resources of God are available to handle the worst thing going on in your life.

That changes the congregation from a community of pretenders to the community of the broken. Too often it is very, very easy to get the impression that the only way to be acceptable in a church community is to dress up, as opposed to admitting that, beneath the fine clothes, there's a lot of warts and a lot of wounds and a lot of bruises. And the point of it all is to do it together, serving each other as companions and guides along the journey to God.

So, what must be true at a corporate level for that mission to be realized in individual lives? Here are the four elements. Four familiar words defined now differently when we talk about the Sunday morning corporate experience.

Element number 1: safety. Can a safe environment actually be created? Can safety be communicated in the Sunday morning worship experience? What does that mean? In American evangelicalism, particularly among the more conservative branch—and I position myself there—safety most often means, or at least frequently means, doctrinal purity. A church is safe if the Word of God is honored, studied, and accepted as the final authority in all matters to which it speaks.

I taught for several years at a seminary where that stance toward Scripture was firm and clear. The Bible is our final authority, and let's get our doctrines properly understood and defined. And yet in that environment where the Bible was honored and the Bible was studied, as a person, I never felt safe. If I didn't speak with their exact voice on particular interpretations to which the school held, I was suspect. And if I revealed that my knowledge of Scripture wasn't changing me in a way that I needed to be changed, if I revealed that even though I was spending time in the Word and faithfully attending church where the Word was preached and going to classes and studying the Bible, and if I revealed that my knowledge of Scripture wasn't changing my life the way I wanted it to be changed, then I was thought to be delving into parts of my life that really shouldn't be dealt with.

Doctrinal soundness is essential. That's certainly something I would trumpet to the skies, but I also would say that doctrinal soundness is not enough. People can and often do walk into a church that is safe from theological heresy and yet remain unknown and untouched. My friend who was depressed over his return of pornographic struggles went to a safe church doctrinally speaking, and it became unimportant in his life.

But think differently. Suppose safety meant something more, not less, than doctrinal purity. Suppose safety meant that because of doctrinal purity, because of orthodox Christian doctrine, especially about the New Covenant, because of the thrill of what Christ has done in our hearts (which doctrine teaches us is true), that people were, therefore, free to be real and confident that in their "realness" they would never be discarded.

Suppose the worship leader included music that told of sadness and doubt as well as of joy and hope. Suppose the pastor spoke of current struggles in his life, not just ones he overcame ten years ago, and suppose the message through music and preaching on Sunday morning was consistently: “We don’t have to pretend about anything. Watch us, we’ll model that truth because we believe that grace is bigger than every problem a human being will ever experience.” Then the church would be on its way to becoming a community in safety.

Element number 2: vision. I’ve served on several elder boards in various churches. I can recall one where the pastor came back from a sabbatical and announced with great excitement to the elders, “God gave me a vision for our church.” And we all sat on the edge of our seats as he shared what the vision was, and what he essentially said was this: Doubled attendance in two years and a double-sized new sanctuary. Vision at the corporate level of church so often has to do with attendance, buildings, and cash, the ABCs of modern church life. It is possible, I would suggest, and from your experience you know this—it’s possible to pursue a vision for size and for bigger buildings in a way that distracts us from God’s agenda for His people.

Don’t hear me being concerned about a desire to see a church grow numerically. Don’t hear me saying that building programs—and getting wonderful facilities where God’s people can accomplish wonderful things together—are bad. Of course they’re good. But be very sensitive to the fact that when the word *vision* centrally means numbers and buildings and financial stability, when the vision centrally means that kind of thing, it can distract us from God’s central agenda for His people: to become more like Christ and to worship Him well.

Vision, New Covenant style, is all about the truth that the Spirit right now is at work in everybody’s life in the church. The Spirit is doing something in everybody you run into on Sunday morning between Sunday school and the preaching service. It’s about who we can be for the pleasure of God and for the sake of His kingdom. It’s all about saying from up front on Sunday morning, “It’s safe to be real, because we have a vision for your life that no power except your unwillingness can thwart.”

Imagine folks from the congregation getting up on Sunday morning and giving testimony to current battles, and a group of spiritual leaders gathering around that individual, who perhaps is weeping over the weakness in his or her life, and the leaders gathering around and pronouncing a vision for what could happen and what they were trusting God to do in this man’s life, in this woman’s life, and inviting the congregation to be a part of the movement of God in this brother or sister’s life. SoulCare might break out in that congregation.

Element number 3: wisdom. Have you noticed that church boards are often made up of successful people—people who know how to make money and how to run companies and achieve prominence? Nothing’s wrong with that. But have we in the church reduced the word *wisdom* to mean something that is better defined by the word *savvy*, the ability to move through life with visible success? Maybe wisdom has less to do with savvy and more to do with a discernment that comes through humility and often through suffering. Biblical wisdom is not about success. It’s about a familiarity with the human soul and the ways of God that lets one see the obstacles to spiritual growth, and lets one discern the hunger for growth, and lets one know how that hunger for growth can be nourished.

Suppose the pastor, on Sunday morning, told stories about what was blocking movement toward God in his life and revealed that kind of wisdom, and how a spiritual director, the man or woman he went to talk to about his own spiritual journey, had suggested certain things, and he gave an example of wisdom in his own life about how his own journey was going. People might realize how badly they want a similar conversation with somebody wise. SoulCare might become the norm in that church.

The last element, very briefly: power. Power in our culture so often means the ability to make something happen. It's happened more than once to me that before I've gone out to address a large conference, my host would say to me, "Knock them dead. Hit a home run." Only a few times after the talk has someone said, "You hit a home run."

But when they do, when I've hit a home run, when I've had the power to get out there and make it all happen, I feel pride and I feel pressure to make it happen again. The next speaking engagement becomes a source of anxiety as opposed to an opportunity for God's glory. Spiritual power is very different than the ability to make something happen. Spiritual power is centered in abiding in Christ, which includes waiting on Him when the results are not there and when visible power is not present. And it's getting out of His way.

Mother Teresa was once asked, "How can we pray for you?" She paused for just a moment, and she answered (and this is a quote), "Oh, pray that I'll get out of God's way." Imagine a group of leaders shunning prominence, elevating others, making people think more about Christ than about themselves—that releases power, and then SoulCare begins to happen.

Safety, vision, wisdom, power. A church—the environment in which SoulCare develops. When it develops, what might it look like? How can we get relationships of SoulCare going so the church becomes a community of spiritual friends? That will occupy us in our next presentation.

Discussion Questions

Dr. Crabb wants a revolution in his life and in the church where “our desire for God actually becomes stronger than our desire to fix our problems.” To what extent is that revolution occurring in your life?

What three characteristics does Pastor Jim Kallam suggest a church must exhibit in order to foster spiritual community? How do these elements support the practice of SoulCare?

Define, in your own words, the following four elements. Discuss how each might help foster SoulCare and greater spiritual growth in a church:

- Safety
- Vision
- Wisdom
- Power

How does spiritual friendship help a church work through the process of spiritual growth?

Lesson 9 Study Guide

CC204 ***SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens***

Entering the Real Church of Supernatural
Community: The Covenant of SoulCare

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, we think about the type of covenant that unites believers, one that God promises to bless.

When you complete this lesson, “Entering the Real Church of Supernatural Community: The Covenant of SoulCare,” you should be able to:

- Explain what a perichoretic relationship is.
- Know how to start SoulCare relationships that help a church become a community of spiritual friends.
- Discuss ways in which a covenant can help unite believers around SoulCare and spiritual formation.
- Describe a group covenant that can foster spiritual growth and SoulCare.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Nine: Entering the Real Church of Supernatural Community: The Covenant of SoulCare

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

As I prepared for these final two presentations, I found myself praying earnestly for the mind of Christ. I've prayed for the Spirit's leadership in all of the presentations that I have given in this course, but never so passionately as for these last two presentations. Let me tell you why. There are really two reasons.

First, I believe that SoulCare conversations, the real topic of this entire curriculum, are at the heart of our Lord's passion. Before our Lord died, He asked His Father to make His people one. Have you pondered what that meant? Here our Lord is about to go to the cross to have nails put in His hands and, far worse, to become sin for me. And before He experiences that incredible horror, He says, "Father, I'm willing to go. It's Your will, and what I want so much out of this is for My people to become a community. I want them to become one. I want them to become one, Father, the way You and I are one." [See John 17.]

Theologians have a fancy word for that. They talk about relationships among the Trinity as perichoretic relationships, or perichoresis. Those unusual words the theologians use refer to a kind of relationship where two or three people, where a community of people, are relating in ways that are both interpenetrating and interanimating—a relationship where people actually enter into the depths of each other's being (that's interpenetration) and stir up what is there. Stir up the life that's there until it becomes more than it could have been without the relationship.

The Trinity, theologians teach us, always relate perichoretically. The closest analogy that we small-minded humans are familiar with is the sexual act, but when we relate perichoretically at a soul level, not a physical level, then that's when we're knowing each other. That's when we're entering each other through exploring and discovering. That's when we're touching each other. That's SoulCare. And when we relate perichoretically, hidden life becomes visible. The seed that's already there becomes a tree. The flame becomes a fire. Life breaks out.

So as the Lord contemplated His death, what was foremost in His mind and His heart was that we would develop SoulCare relationships. It was so important to Jesus that I want to say boldly, I want to say it with all my heart, what He wants me to say. So I prayed hard about these last two presentations.

The second reason I prayed especially hard for these last two is that SoulCare conversations are blatantly supernatural. If the Spirit is not ruling and controlling the conversation, if Christ is not present in His mystical way through His Spirit, and if the passions coming out of my heart are not His passions and the wisdom governing my words is not His wisdom, then it's a natural

conversation, and all these glorious things that I say could happen in relationships simply will not happen.

SoulCare conversations are not developed through learning skills. They're not developed through going through a counseling program. They are not developed through going through a curriculum on SoulCare. While knowledge can be imparted, the key is not knowledge. There is something supernatural here. If we're really going to stir up our appetite for God until that passion is consuming and every other desire is reduced to a "second-thing" passion, that's going to take a miracle. It's going to take more than I can pull off, more than you can pull off, more than we can pull off together. It's going to take a miracle. It's going to take the Spirit stirring up our hearts until we, as we relate together, interpenetrate and interanimate. SoulCare conversations are always a miracle. They are a miracle of grace. So I prayed especially hard to speak under the Spirit's influence on these last two presentations.

I want to again key off our Lord's words in Matthew 18 to suggest how we might practically begin moving toward the rich reality of spiritual friendship, how we can begin to move toward the exquisite release of spiritual friendship that's potential in every believer. Each one of us has the calling and the opportunity, the privilege, the responsibility to become a spiritual friend to at least one or two other people.

Listen again to what our Lord said: "Where two or three are gathered in My name . . . where they are gathered together in My name, I will be in the midst of them." Let me now use our Lord's teaching to develop an understanding of what spiritual friendship might look like in a small group. I believe the future of the church has a lot to do with small groups, and I want to talk about two key pillars on which small groups are built. Keying on our Lord's words in Matthew 18, the two key pillars are these.

Number 1: covenant. What is the agreement we consciously and intentionally make when we get together for the purpose of spiritual friendship? If we don't have an agreed-upon covenant, if we aim nowhere in particular, we'll not arrive where our Lord wants us to arrive. The key pillar, then, is a covenant, an agreement that binds us together and that defines our reasons for getting together.

The second pillar that we'll talk about later is the word *format*. What do you actually do—if we're going to get all this SoulCare into a reality of spiritual friendship that is going to become meaningful—what do we do when ten people gather in a living room? What do you do when a couple of people meet for prayer in a coffee shop at six in the morning? What do you do?

Covenant and format. Let me first talk about covenant.

Just before our Lord promised that He would be present to a small group of His followers when they met in His name, just before He talked about that, He was talking about relational tensions among His followers. He was talking about: How do you handle it when somebody offends you? How do you handle it when somebody hurts your feelings, when you feel slighted by somebody else, when somebody does wrong to you? And if you look at His teaching carefully, I think it can be boiled down to something very simple. What He says is this: If you can reconcile, by all means do

so. Don't let pride or ego get in the way. Be humble enough to reconcile wherever you can. Don't let whatever distance exists between you and somebody else ever be your fault. But if you can't reconcile—and there are times you just won't be able to for whatever variety of reasons—if you can't reconcile, and if your spiritual community has heard the story and agrees that you've done all you can to reconcile and that reconciliation is not a possibility at least for the moment, then don't include (now listen to this rather radical thought; it's what our Lord taught), don't include someone who is not of one mind with you in your purposes of pursuing God's glory. Don't include that person in your circle of fellowship.

Then He says, effectively, don't get hung up on legalistic obsessions. Get on with your life. According to your best understanding, what will allow you to glorify God and to serve others? And then He adds, and I want you to notice this: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." He's presuming now that a couple of people are getting together who agree distinctly—not people who disagree, not people where fellowship is impossible because there's been no clear commitment to living out God's glory, in relationships where somebody else is holding a grudge, and where distance is not your fault but it continues to exist. What God is saying is: Get together with people whom you can agree with. Get together with people who are pursuing the same God that you worship and are pursuing the same goals: You want to glorify God. You want to become like Jesus. You want to pay any price to become like Jesus. You want to learn what it means to have an appetite for Him that exceeds every other appetite. When there's a common heart and common mind, then get together and agree.

The word *agree* in the text is profound. It literally means for two people to symphonize. That's a more literal translation of the word—when you agree, when you symphonize. It's a musical term. To become like musical instruments that are all playing from the same score to produce beautiful music, that's what He's saying. If you do that, expect results. God will answer that prayer. If you symphonize your hearts in pursuit of the same beauty, then God says, "I'll be there, and My Father in heaven will answer your prayer."

I think what He's doing is . . . He's saying to you people in a small group, if you symphonize on the proper covenant, God will be there. "My Father will send His Spirit to see to it that your small group reaches the purposes that you've agreed to meet for." Think about that.

Profound agreement at the deepest levels is simply not possible among people committed to themselves: I want this for me; you want that for you. There's no symphony there. That's not beautiful music. That's discordant. But when the Spirit seizes people's hearts (and lots of folks have unseized hearts), and the few that meet together with commonly seized hearts meet together in Jesus' name, that means that they have transcended their own interests, and they have united in the simple purpose of glorifying God and spiritually forming into the image of Christ.

Now think for a moment about how rare that is. You've all been in small groups. I've been in a bunch. And if you could hear what's really happening inside people, I think you'd hear things like this: "You know, I want to spend more time in Bible study. I don't like the fact that we're telling so many stories." Or, "I want more respect and attention in this group. People don't seem to think that I have much to offer, and when I speak I get interrupted all the time by that guy over there,

and it drives me nuts.” Or, “I want to talk less personally and vulnerably. This group is getting too personal and deep. It kind of scares me a bit, and I’m not sure if it’s right to meddle with all this internal stuff. We should just stay with the Scripture, I think.” Or, “Well, I really want to pray more. I just think the key to the Christian life is prayer, and I don’t like this new kind of praying you people are doing. You are calling it contemplative prayer. I think we ought to just get on our knees and ask God to bless us; and all this fancy, new-fangled stuff, I’m not into that particularly.” Or, “Well, you know, I want to make the group more social. My life is so full of stress. I want the group to be a good time. Every time we meet, I want to leave a little more uplifted. I just want to share how things are going for each of us and kind of have a good time and have a good meal together and, sure, say some Bible things and pray a little bit, but can’t we just have a good time? Is it wrong for Christians to have fun?” Or, “I want people to hear me share. I really want to share what’s happening in my heart, but I don’t want you to pursue me. I just want you to hear me say what’s hard, then just keep your distance and pray for me and give me a hug at the door, and I’ll be happy. But just don’t get too close.”

All those individual agendas are going on in most of our groups, so it’s no wonder small groups are not always very successful. As a result, I would suggest that, more often than not, we as groups of Christians are meeting in our own names and not in Jesus’ name, and the effect is that we’re not united. The effect is that we’re not in agreement about a common purpose that grips our hearts, about a common purpose that releases an incredibly deep passion within our souls that the Spirit of God has put there. It could be different. Well, how do we translate some idealistic stuff about what it could be, into the reality of what actually might be?

Suppose we all work together in a group to write out a covenant. Suppose there is an agreement that we all made, that we all signed off on, not legalistically but passionately—a covenant where we agreed: This is why we’re gathering. Suppose we pondered the mind of Christ together and found a group of people who shared a similar conviction about what the mind of Christ is all about from Scripture, and suppose we realized how much our Lord suffered so that we could be one. Suppose we got together with a handful of people who looked at John 17 and said: The Lord was willing to go through all of that so we could get together and relate perichoretically, that we could actually get to know each other and explore and discover and touch. We could actually spiritually form. God could actually get pleasure out of the fact that we’re gathered around Him. We could actually become more like Jesus, and my lusts could be better controlled, and my irritability could yield to patience. I could actually become a better person. That people would say, “It sounds to me, it looks to me, like you’ve been with Jesus,” and I would say, “You know, I have, in my small group, because we’ve gathered together with an agreement, and Jesus promised to be there, so yeah, I’ve actually been with Jesus. It’s really wonderful.”

I’m part of a small group—eight people that we call an intentional spiritual formation group—and we have written out our mission. We’ve discussed together why it is we’re going to gather, and we’ve agreed on a covenant. We’ve agreed on what we are going to do—why we walk in the door of this person’s home, why we drive across town to meet on Sunday night with this group of people—and all of us are becoming increasingly conscious that this covenant that we’ve agreed to defines our reasons for getting together. Well, we have secondary reasons. We happen to like each other. We have a good meal, and I love eating well, and all those things are there, and we tell some jokes and have a good time over the meal, but there’s something that is central that puts everything else to the periphery. What is our covenant?

Jesus said, “Those of you who have the keys of the kingdom, who have the authority under My Spirit, under the authority of My Word, to make decisions as to how you’re going to relate together to become like Christians should be, to live like Christians, those of you who have that authority, you come together and you determine, you bind on earth, your reason for getting together. And when it’s under My authority, when it’s in My name, then My Father in heaven will seal it. And I will see to it, as My Father in His authority arranges it and sends His Spirit to make it happen, I will see to it that your small group is blessed. Be patient. Wait. It might get sloppy and have some rough edges, but good things will happen in your small group.”

When we get together with the keys of the kingdom and make a covenant and make an agreement, supernatural things happen. I believe that we are using the keys of the kingdom to live more like citizens of heaven. We’re permitting certain things that we agree to do in our time together, and we’re agreeing that we’re not going to do certain other things. And I believe with all my heart that if spiritual friendship and SoulCare are going to develop in our groups, in our communities, that when we get together under a covenant that we have agreed on as holders of the keys, that God stamps our plan approved. And when we gather, Christ shows up. In our small group, we can, therefore, count on meaningful spiritual formation to take place, so long as we stay agreed on our covenant and so long as we honor it.

I want to read to you our mission statement. I want to read to you just one example, not meant to be the norm, not meant to be the formula, but I want to read to you one example of a mission statement that might help you understand one way to set the stage for spiritual friendship to take place. We’ve put together a little notebook that each group member has; we call our group very simply “the intentional spiritual formation group,” and our mission statement can be defined as follows. Our mission, very simply, in a few words, is this: to live out Hebrews 10:24. Hebrews 10:24, you might remember the verse—where the writer of the Hebrews is wanting us to gather together under the authority and with the provisions of the New Covenant; that’s all in Hebrews 10. He then says this: “When you get together, I want you to think hard. I want you to consider, that’s the word in your translation. The word in the Greek means, “to think ongoingly.” Don’t stop thinking, and think really rigorously, think really hard.

Consider how to stimulate—that’s the perichoresis part. Consider how you can enter another person’s life, know, explore, discover, touch, perichoretically relate. Consider how you can stimulate (how you get inside somebody else’s soul and take what is in you by the provisions of the New Covenant and pour it into somebody else so that they are released to love and do good deeds) . . . consider how to stimulate others to love and good deeds. Our mission statement is how to live out Hebrews 10:24, and we’ve embellished that or put it in the following words.

Here’s our mission: “We long to think hard in dependence on God’s Spirit about how we can relate to each other, so that we enjoy and arouse the supreme passion for God and the sufficient wisdom to live that the Spirit has already deposited in our hearts.”

Let me say it again. We want to live out Hebrews 10:24—the way we understand that, what we’ve agreed upon, what we’re binding on earth as believers who are gathering in Jesus’ name, the mission we believe that God has stamped, “I approve,” is this: We long to think hard, not to be casual about it, but to be concerted about it. We long to think hard in dependence, radical

dependence, on God's Spirit. This is supernatural stuff. We long to think hard in dependence on God's Spirit about how we can relate to each other so that we enjoy and arouse—so that I can enjoy something in you, I can arouse it to a greater strength—so that we enjoy and arouse two things: one, the supreme passion for God and, two, the sufficient wisdom to live that the Spirit has already deposited in our hearts. That's our mission. That's what we're wanting to do.

Now in order to accomplish that mission, we've made a covenant. We've agreed that if we are going to honor that mission, it's going to require certain things. Let me just read to you the covenant that we've all agreed to.

“To that end”—to the end of our mission—“we covenant together to do four things. Number 1: to enter into a community experience dedicated to intentional spiritual formation . . .” Remember, I talked about different kinds of conversations—social conversations and task-centered conversations and informational conversations—all legitimate things but with different purposes than the SoulCare conversation. We're committing to have conversations that are not fundamentally social. We're not going to be antisocial. We're going to enjoy each other, but our purpose in what we say is spiritual formation. It's not to have a good time, because sometimes spiritual formation is not a good time. It's painful along the way, just like surgery.

So we are covenanting together to enter into a community experience “dedicated to intentional spiritual formation.” Well, that's a fancy word we have to define, so we've defined it, for the sake of our group, this way; this is what we've bound on earth and believe God has stamped his approval seal on. We define spiritual formation as “the supernatural process where the passion and wisdom that ruled in Jesus, when He lived on earth, increasingly rules in us.” That's what we want to see happen in each other's lives. So we've covenanted together to enter into an experience of relationship, dedicated to that end.

Secondly, we covenanted together to encourage visible or invisible—we might not see it—“supernatural movement toward a developed and specific vision for each group member.” Part of that agreement, then, means that we look at each other and we say, “What is the Spirit up to in this woman's life? What is the Spirit up to in this guy's life?” Do I have a vision that I'm in the pains of childbirth until it's happening, until Christ is more and more formed in this person? And I want to encourage any movement that I can possibly see toward that North Star, or toward the vision that I have for that man. And it's specific. It's thought through, and over time we develop an understanding of what the Spirit might be doing in that person's life, and then the words that come out of my mouth are governed by a desire to encourage movement in that direction. That's number 2.

Number 3: We covenant together to enhance by our relational style—whether we tell jokes, whether we're sarcastic, whether we like a certain kind of humor that is biting, whether we like to quote Bible verses, whether we like to name-drop and let people know the important person we happened to have lunch with last week—we covenant together to “enhance by our relationship style a grace environment.”

When we think of the grace environment, we mean three things by it. We covenant together to enhance by our relationship style a grace environment that is characterized by acceptance and

affirmation, not direction and criticism; characterized by offered presence, not communicated pressure; characterized, thirdly, by deliberate dependence on the Spirit, not careless engagement with each other. To enhance by our relational environment, by our relational style, a grace environment characterized by acceptance and affirmation, not direction (“do this”) and criticism (“why didn’t you do this?”); characterized by offered presence (“I’m here. I’m not going away”), rather than communicated pressure (“I don’t know why you didn’t do this. We met last meeting and we talked about this. Did you do it? What’s the matter with you?”)—accountability gone awry. And thirdly, a grace environment characterized by deliberate dependence on the Spirit. We know that if we’re not consciously thinking about Him and how He’s nudging our hearts, we’re going to get careless, and words out of our mouths will become unwholesome, and they will not be suitable for growth in that individual.

Fourthly, we covenant together—first, to enter a community; second, to encourage supernatural movement; third, to enhance a certain kind of grace environment—and now, fourthly, we covenant together to “energize the cycle of spiritual formation in each other.”

We want to be a part of God’s movement in watching each of us go through the cycle repeatedly over and over until the day we die—the cycle of brokenness over failure and wounds (we’re not the people we long to be), over repentance from self-dependence (God, You’re the source of joy, not my efforts to make life work), of abandonment to God, dependence (God, I’m going to trust You for everything, because if You don’t come through, I’m a dead man. And I believe that, I joyfully believe that, because I’m abandoning myself to You), and that leads to confidence (You’re there and Your purposes are good and Your presence is real), and, lastly, to release.

Brokenness, repentance, abandonment, confidence, and release of our uniqueness on behalf of Christ and His kingdom—as we covenant together to do those things, we make the obvious agreement that we’ll never share outside the group any identifying details of what is shared inside the group. Confidentiality is certainly part of safety. We agree that we will pray for each other on a regular basis, and that we’ll make our group meetings a priority, both with our schedules as well as with our energy.

Well, that’s our mission, and that’s our covenant. And as you decide how you’re going to bind together what you are going to bind in your small group, what you are going to forbid in your small group, as you agree on your purposes to glorify God, you might put it very differently than we’ve put it. But God will put His stamp—approved—on your plan if you’re getting together with people whose hearts have all been seized by the same goal.

SoulCare conversations certainly can happen in a coffee shop or living room, but they never happen without an intentional conscious decision to engage in SoulCare at least on the part of the SoulCare provider. But if all parties agree on the covenant, if we agree in the presence of God, then the presence of Christ is guaranteed and the power of the Father is released to accomplish the purposes that we commit to in Jesus’ name. No matter how sloppy your group might get, no matter how frustrating it might be for long seasons, no matter how inadequate people feel, the Spirit will honor the agreement. Supernatural SoulCare will take place.

With the covenant you have to do something. The question is “What do you do?” That’s the question of format, and we’ll look at that in our last presentation.

Discussion Questions

How does the Trinity illustrate a perichoretic relationship? How does this apply to believers?

Why is a SoulCare conversation a “miracle of grace”?

Since we each have the “responsibility to become a spiritual friend to at least one or two other people,” whom do you have in mind? Why did you choose this person/people?

Why is it important in small groups that we agree “about a common purpose that grips our hearts and that releases an incredibly deep spiritual passion within our souls”?

Dr. Crabb’s small group covenanted together to do four things:

- Enter into a community experience dedicated to intentional spiritual formation.
- Encourage supernatural movement toward a specific vision for each group member.
- Enhance a grace environment by their relationship style.
- Energize the cycle of spiritual formation in each other.

How might you incorporate such goals in a small group?

Lesson 10 Study Guide

CC204

***SoulCare Foundations IV:
Community—Where
SoulCare Happens***

Entering the Real Church of Supernatural
Community: A Format for SoulCare

Updated 2015



**Our Daily Bread
Christian University**

Objectives

In this lesson, Dr. Crabb discusses a possible format that will allow SoulCare through spiritual friendship to become an increasingly important and vital reality in your community.

When you complete this lesson, “Entering the Real Church of Supernatural Community: A Format for SoulCare,” you should be able to:

- Implement a small group format designed to encourage SoulCare through spiritual friendship.
- Explain seven activities that a small group can engage in to create deeper community and foster spiritual growth.

Transcript

Course Title: SoulCare Foundations IV: Community—Where SoulCare Happens

Lesson Ten: Entering the Real Church of Supernatural Community: A Format for SoulCare

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

When I left private practice as a clinical psychologist to lead a counselor training program many years ago, I sought counsel from a wise, godly, older Christian psychiatrist. He said to me when I told him of my plans, “I’ve supervised many graduates, many interns from Christian counseling programs, and my observation is this,” he told me, “so many graduates of Christian counseling programs know how to discuss a client around a conference table, so many are full of jargon that practically is useless, and so many are full of high-sounding but half-baked biblical ideas. But get the person out of the case discussion and give them an actual client and tell them to have a rich conversation, and a lot of graduates of counseling programs,” my psychiatrist friend told me, “really don’t know what to do.”

We can talk theory, but what does it mean to do it? What does SoulCare conversation actually involve? Well, I hope in the course of all these sessions that we’ve given some thoughts about what SoulCare conversation might look like. The basic model that we’ve developed I think provides a roadmap, a guide for how to actually converse. But in this last presentation I want to get as practical as I know how to get. I want to sketch what I believe you can do, what I can do, in an actual SoulCare conversation, and what I want to suggest is suited mainly to a small group, but with some adaptation could be useful in one-on-one conversations.

I want to talk about a format you can follow once you’ve agreed on a covenant. Once your agreement—as two or three or ten or twelve or one or two—once you’ve agreed on a covenant that you’re getting together for the purpose of intentional spiritual formation, that you desire to know God and you long for that desire to become stronger than any other desire, and you’re getting together to arouse the appetite for God in each other—when you agree that that’s your covenant and you’re going to relate perichoretically so that these things happen, then the next question is: “So what do we do? What’s the format?”

The format I want to suggest to you again is simply one suggestion, and I hope that in your own creativity and your own prayer life and your own dialogue with friends, you’ll come up with vast improvements on this. But I want to suggest seven distinct activities that you might reflect on and adapt any way you choose, but when you get together—whatever activities you choose, whether you follow the seven I’m going to suggest or change them in wonderful ways—that they’re always going to center around the exhortation of Hebrews 10:24: Consider how to arouse the redeemed heart’s desire so that the Christian follower loves and is interested in, longs to do, good deeds.

Here’s one way to do that: seven distinct activities. Let me give you the setting before I give you the seven activities. Just a very practical suggestion from my experience would be this: When you meet in a SoulCare group dedicated for the purpose of spiritual formation, allow at least two and

a half hours for the group meeting. And may I strongly suggest that if you eat together as a group, which I think is always a good idea, that you do it after your SoulCare conversation? You do it after your time of getting together for the unique purpose of relating perichoretically. Have the meal after your two-and-a-half-hour period. I'm asking you to dedicate an entire evening, obviously, to a SoulCare experience.

Activity number 1: The group gathers. They come together at five o'clock in the afternoon, on a Sunday afternoon perhaps, and the agreement is that they are not going to come in and just spend the first hour chitchatting and socializing and enjoying hors d'oeuvres. Certainly you come in with a loose, happy, "Good to see you. How ya been?" and hugs, and all that sort of thing, but pretty soon, within a few minutes, you get down to the agreed-upon activities, because you're coming not primarily to have a good time, although SoulCare is a wonderful time, but it requires some discipline, and so, rather quickly you move into activity number 1, which I suggest you might call the sacrament of delight. Activity number 1: the sacrament of delight.

Zephaniah in his short prophecy anticipates the day...he anticipates the New Covenant day when God will be able to look at His people and, as Zephaniah says in chapter 3 and verse 17, He will be able to look at His people and just burst out into song, and say, "That's My kid. Look at that girl; she's Mine. Look at that guy; he's Mine," and burst out in singing and saying, "He's Mine. She's Mine. I'm delighted." He will sing with delight over His children, and He will quiet them with His love. That's what Zephaniah says will happen under the terms of the New Covenant.

So, the sacrament of delight. What I would suggest you do is realize that your function is to be like the moon reflecting the brightness of the sun to somebody else. With one specific person in mind, bring that person into the presence of the Trinity and eavesdrop on the three of Them talking about that friend and convey to Them, "What in Sally right now is bringing God to the point of bursting out in song? As God looks at my friend Sally, what is He singing about in her life?" Now here's how we actually do it. Here's how we take that elegant-sounding material and bring it down to an actual activity.

We draw names from a bag, and whatever name we draw, we go off for a ten-minute period, and during those ten minutes we simply pray. Now when we say *pray*, we don't mean, in this case, petition. We don't say, "Lord, bless Sally. We know that her son right now is having some trouble, and please bless them and give them wisdom." We don't do that. There's a place for that, but not here. What we do for ten minutes is we literally eavesdrop on God. We simply lift the person into the presence of the Trinity, and we discern—we get very open to what the Spirit might be saying on behalf of the Father and the Son about Sally. What is He delighted in? What is He seeing happen in her because of His grace in her heart? What is happening that the Father and the Son and the Spirit are saying, "Look what Our power is doing in that human being. This is so exciting."

And as we discern something (and sometimes we discern nothing), but as we discern something, we have 4 x 6 index cards, and we write a little personal note, "Dear Sally, what I perceive God is singing over you about right now is the following . . ." And we write out this little card, and we come back together after ten minutes of prayer and eavesdropping. (And by the way, eavesdropping is dangerous with everybody but God. When you eavesdrop on somebody else, you've no idea what you're going to hear. When you eavesdrop on God, under the terms of the New

Covenant, you can always count on a song; you can always count on an affirmation of delight.) And so we come back into our group with our little 4 x 6 cards, and we read them to each member. And I read: “Dear Sally, Here’s what God laid on my heart to say to you. Sally, I believe that . . .” and we read the card and we have these little packets where we save the cards so that at the year-end (we meet monthly), we have twelve cards from various friends in our community that express to us how they believe God is delighting over us.

Can I tell you that those cards are wonderful to read at 2:00 in the morning when you are discouraged? The sacrament of delight: activity number 1.

Activity number 2 we call the discipline of truth. If you begin a group with personal sharing, more often than not you’re running the incredible risk of becoming a very self-focused group. I don’t think it’s wise. My suggestion to you: I don’t think it’s wise to begin a group by saying, “Let’s share. How’s your life going?” because then the focus is on me, my life, and narcissism. Our natural bent to narcissism remains unchecked. Therefore, our second activity, the discipline of truth, could be one or more folks discussing a passage where we agree that we’re meeting under the authority of the God who speaks through His Word. And so we ask, “Who in the group has been meditating on a passage that has particularly spoken to them?” And we suggest that each group member come prepared to spend ten or fifteen minutes in essentially teaching a passage, in giving us the content. “You know, as I was meditating . . .”

At the last group meeting we had, I talked about Matthew 18—maybe no surprise to you. And I shared: “You know, it just occurred to me as I read this passage, that Jesus is promising to be in our presence if we gather in His name. Let’s talk about what that means. That passage has meant something to me in this past week.” And I shared that passage.

That requires, of course, some preliminary study. That means that spiritual formation is not just a touchy-feely kind of a group. It’s a group that is disciplined under the revealed Word of God. If we’re to gather in Jesus’ name, we must gather under the Jesus Book. We must gather under the one inspired Book that from beginning to end is about Jesus. This activity not only informs and lets us get to know that Book as God has spoken to various members of our community, but it also humbles; it encourages our hearts to submit to authority. The discipline of truth: activity number 2.

Activity number 3: the opportunity to hear. That passage, or perhaps another that was meaningful to another group member, is then read by one group member out loud while the other members close their eyes and listen. In activity number 3, the opportunity to hear, we take seriously, and we urge you—I urge you—to take seriously, the fact that the Bible really is God’s Word and God has spoken content that He wants, by His Spirit, to penetrate into the core of my heart. He wants to have a conversation with me through His Word, and so rather than just teaching what we believe the passage means and how it’s affected one member, we now invite the group to create the opportunity to very specifically and very deeply and very meaningfully hear from God Himself. Here’s how we do it, and here’s what we would suggest might be a way you might want to consider.

One person will read the passage, perhaps three to ten verses. It shouldn’t be a long passage. One person will read the passage out loud, while the others listen with eyes closed in a spirit of

meditation. And as the person reads the passage out loud, the other members with eyes closed invite the Spirit of God to speak to them any way He chooses. Someone has said that real prayer is a conversation with God where He gets the first word. This is our attempt to give God the first word. We don't come to Him and say, "Here's our problem. Tell us what to do." We come to Him and say, "What do You want to feed us tonight? How do You want to speak to our hearts?" And so for the first read-through (we do three readings), with eyes closed we listen as one member reads the brief passage, and we ask a simple question: "Is there a phrase, a word, that seems to be stirring in my heart, that seems to be coming alive as I hear the Word of God read?" And after that passage is read, we sit silently for maybe a minute, maybe two minutes, and then we begin to come back to the group, our eyes open, and several of us might share, "This phrase just seemed to feel alive to me." Another might say nothing at all. "I didn't feel anything." That's okay. But whatever seems to stir, we share.

Then the reader reads a second time, again with members closing their eyes and listening. But this time you listen with a suggestion that we're listening not just for a particular word or phrase but a particular feeling or image or idea. Something that comes to us maybe out of a different phrase that as we listen impresses our hearts, and we say, "I'm just getting a picture of what it might mean to lie beside still waters. The phrase *still waters* occurred to me in the first reading, but now the image of me lying beside still waters as I anticipate the court date for my son next week . . . I'm thinking about lying beside still waters. I feel like God is speaking to me about that." Reading number 2.

Reading number 3: The reader reads a third time, the exact same passage, and we again close our eyes and meditate. This time we meditate more, not legalistically, not imposingly, but we suggest that the focus be more on "What is the Spirit moving us to do? What is He moving us toward?" We come back to the group after a minute's meditation and begin sharing what we hear the Spirit saying, and perhaps that dear mother is saying, "I thought of still waters in the first reading from Psalm 23. I thought about what it would mean for me to lie beside still waters with my son in trouble, and then it occurred to me, 'I need to go to my son, and I need to let him know that I'm deeply for him and that I'm with him. I've been avoiding talking to him. I've been so scared and so resentful.'" That's the third activity: the opportunity to hear from God. We believe it quiets our souls. We believe it puts us in the posture of humility. We believe it puts us in the posture of saying, "God, You must speak, or we have nothing. We want to hear from You."

Activity number 4: the call to community. When Paul returned from three years in the desert after his conversion, he spent a week or two with Peter. We're told in Galatians that when Peter and Paul got together, when they first met each other (these two pillars of the church were first becoming acquainted) they spent their time in, as one translation has the phrase, *getting acquainted*. The more earthy, literal translation is that when Paul and Peter got together they swapped stories. Wouldn't you love to have a tape recording of that conversation? "Peter, I can't believe it. I saw this light. . . . Blind, I fell to the ground. Let me tell you what happened." And Peter is saying, "Well, I tell you, when the Lord told me that I was going to betray Him, I thought, 'No way in the world.' Boy, did I get humble. He is really working me over really good." Can you imagine the conversation between Peter and Paul?

I wonder if we could swap stories. I wonder if we could recognize that we're not together just for a social time of telling jokes and bantering and having fun. There's a place for that, but not in an intentional formation, spiritual formation group.

But we suggest what might be a good way to go about the call to community is to provide at least an hour; an hour's opportunity to know, explore, discover, and touch one other person. A strong suggestion in passing: Don't get together for the purpose of catching up on each other's lives. That's not a good time for social conversation. Maybe over the meal that follows you can do that and have a wonderful time doing it. That's legitimate. But during your intentional spiritual formation time, do more than: "You have ten minutes. Catch us up on how things are going with your life." Let's spend an hour where one person, after a season of prayer (maybe we gather together and we bow our heads and ask, "Lord, will You have me be the one to talk about my life tonight?") when one person agrees, "Yes, I would like to share something of my story with you tonight. You know me well—or you don't know me well—but I would like you to know me better than you know me." And then you might want to consider a bit of a liturgical beginning to this swapping-the-story part, to the sharing-story part.

We suggest that, almost in a formal style, which I know can seem contrived, and it might even seem corny to some of you, but in a liturgical style it might be good to begin the sharing time by having the one who is willing to be known, explored, discovered, and touched, actually saying so. And the liturgical comment might go something like this. (You write your own version of it.) Our version is this: "I invite you into my soul, to know, explore, discover, and touch me, so that we might connect and I might resemble Jesus more. That's why I'm talking to you now. I invite you into my life. Understand that you will never, ever know me unless I'm willing to be known by you." This is our effort to express from the deepest part of our heart: "I'm willing to be known."

That formal, repeated-each-time invitation, again, might seem artificial, but it's a way of honoring intentionally; without that, you will find yourselves pulled downward to mere social conversation where the agenda is just to catch up. You allow an hour for spiritual friendship to actually take place as the other members of the group provide you with SoulCare through spiritual friendship. Their commitment as spiritual friends is that they will provide safety. You know as you begin to share that this is a safe place, because my friends are celebrating grace. The passion within their heart that rules them as they listen to whatever I share is the passion of grace. I'm not going to be rejected. They will respectfully probe. They are not going to be intrusive, but they are going to celebrate a profound curiosity that is a passion within their heart that I can count on because that's our covenant. They are going to want to know me better, because they are curious, not because they are intrusive and want material for gossip, but they really want to know what is happening in my life, because they care about me. They see me as a unique image-bearer who is on a journey, and they are curious about how God is moving, and they are going to joyfully affirm; I can count on this as well. They are going to joyfully affirm the Spirit's work by celebrating hope. They are going to know that whatever I share, I don't need to stay in a bad place, that the Spirit of God is up to the job of moving me toward the spiritual formation He saved me to accomplish. And they are going to wisely offer their fourth passion, providing safety, respectfully probing, joyfully affirming, and wisely offering whatever stirs in their hearts. And that's the "touch" part. That's where perichoresis becomes most vibrant.

The time of touching, I might say in passing, could include exhortation, because Paul, who knew the New Covenant better than any of us, wrote his epistles filled with exhortations. And he would say, “Husbands, I want you to love your wives.” That’s Mount Sinai legalism. That’s an exhortation that in the redeemed heart says, “Yes, that’s what I want to do. You reminded me. You’re prompting me toward it, and now I’m doing it, not because you told me to, but I’m doing it because my heart longs to love my wife. Paul, thank you for your exhortation.” Touching might include a variety of things, including exhortation.

The person then begins to share. They begin to tell their story. What do you share? How do you tell your story? “Okay, it’s your turn. Start.” What do you say at that point? “Well, this morning I had breakfast . . .” What do you do when you tell your story? Well, we have a few simple guidelines.

Guidelines like this (and these are meant only to be guidelines, not boundaries) . . . guidelines like sharing the “red dot” in your life. Your walk through life is like going into a large mall with which you’re unfamiliar, and the first thing anybody does in an unfamiliar mall is look for the directory, and you look for the red dot that says “You are here.” So you might start by saying, “Let me give you the red dot. Let me tell you where I am right now in my journey. I am so distant from God. I haven’t prayed in a month. My Bible just feels like a dull book sitting on my table, and I don’t know what’s happening, but I am just as dull toward God as I’ve ever been in my life.” That’s the red dot, and so you share that.

Maybe it’s a story of blessing. “In my life right now I’m in a season of incredible blessing. Ten incredibly wonderful things have happened this last week, and I’m so full of joy I can’t express it. Let me tell you the red dot on my season of blessings.” So you share that. The red dot part might be what you share.

Perhaps somebody wants to discuss how his journey began. It’s interesting how often we’re with Christians and never know how they became Christians. “How did God begin speaking to my heart? What softened me to the gospel when I was 22 years old and I became a Christian? What softened me to the gospel as an eight-year-old boy” (which is my story; I became a Christian at a boys’ camp)? “How come I wasn’t saved before then, being raised in a Christian home where I heard the gospel so much? I don’t know, but here’s how my journey began and let me tell you about the broad strokes of my journey ever since, how it began and what it’s been like. Let me discuss my journey with you.”

Perhaps you’re going to share stories that will indicate key incidents in your life that have shaped your soul. Perhaps you begin answering questions like: In my childhood, when was I most thrilled to be alive? What brought me the deepest joy when I was a teenager? What made me so happy I wanted more of it? I wonder how that shaped my understanding of life.

I remember once when one person shared with me in a group: “I was so happy when I finally got the leading part in the school play. I was a young girl, and when I sang the leading part and I got a standing ovation, I remember saying to myself, ‘This is life.’” As spiritual friends, we can explore that, and we can begin to enter her soul as to how (this will sound harsh, but) how the world, the flesh, and the devil conspired to teach her a strategy for life, a goal for life that had nothing to do with her appetite for God. That was a very difficult evening, a very confrontational evening.

In the course of your time, the person shares their story—the important incidents in their background, their red dot, how their journey began, and how it has continued, whatever they might want to talk about; we have a number of guidelines like that, and you can make up twenty more.

As the person begins sharing their story, the work of spiritual friendship happens. The passions of the Spirit control the listeners. The wisdom of the Spirit determines what they say, and you are now living out, think of the basic model—journeying reality, vision, interior world—you are now living out the passion-wisdom model of SoulCare during this time of responding to the call to community.

Activity number 5: the emergence of vision. During the emergence of vision as people share, rather than trying to fix and make things better, we're attentive to "Where is the Spirit leading this person?" Think what would happen if, in a group of a couple of people, you have dedicated yourself in the next month (for the entire next month) to thinking, "Given what I know of this person, what would this person look like ten years from now as the Spirit continues moving in their lives?" And for the entire month, you know that all the other members of your group are thinking about that, praying about that, and you know that next group meeting you're going to get letters from every member of the group: "Dear Jim, Dear Bob, Dear Sally, Dear Sue . . . My vision for you as I meditate on the uniqueness of your soul and how God can take that and move in certain directions, is as follows . . ." Imagine your thrill in showing up for that group. Put on your crash helmet; it will be an important time. It might rock you a little bit, but you'll be stirred.

Activity number 6: what I call the PAPA prayer. After the call to community, after a person has shared for an hour, then it's prayer time. What does prayer time mean for most groups? "Let's bow in prayer. Dear Lord, bless so and so, they're hurting over this, and the medical test is happening next week, and please make it turn out okay." That's okay, but may I suggest a different kind of prayer? I call it the PAPA, the PAPA prayer. And let me put it to you very simply.

What we do as a group is . . . we envision that Jesus really is in our midst, and so we don't close our eyes. We talk to each other with Him in the center, and we begin with presenting prayer, the first P in PAPA. We simply share. "Here's what I'm aware of right now. We've been meeting for the last two hours. We've gone through listening to the Word. We've had the sacrament of delight. We've done all these activities, and, you know, it hasn't done a thing for me tonight. I'm just frankly bored out of my mind. I'm in a bad mood, and the group for the last two hours has been a colossal boring evening for me. I'm sorry, but that's where I am."

That's part of the prayer. That's part of owning where you are. That's presenting yourself to each other in terms of what you're most aware of, the first P: presenting prayer.

Then attending prayer, the first A in PAPA. "God, here's where I've sensed Your presence. I'm attending to Your presence. Here's where I've sensed You speaking, and here's where I wished I had sensed You speaking, but You seemed so absent," and we talk about that for two or three minutes.

And then the third prayer, the second P in PAPA, the third prayer: purging. “God, here’s what I’m aware of right now, and I’m sure there’s so much more that I haven’t faced. But what I’m aware of right now that’s getting in the way of my listening to You, getting in my way of walking with You, God, here’s what needs to be purged from my life, and let me just tell it to You, Jesus, in the presence of my friends.” We call that the purging prayer.

And then finally the group stands. We join hands, and we engage in the last kind of prayer, approaching prayer. PAPA: presenting, attending, purging, and now with hands joined, in a circle, we just express ourselves to God and say, “As we are, there’s something in us that longs to draw near to You . . .” And that’s how we end that part of the evening—the PAPA prayer.

And then we go into our last activity: the fellowship of the table, activity number 7. The fellowship of the table is where the group shares a meal. That’s where you banter. That’s where you have a good time. No structure, no plan. It might stay very serious based on the last two and a half hours; it might be just a light break where you do tell stories of catching-up things. Whatever happens during that time, let ’er roll.

Well, folks, that’s the course. We’ve considered ten key foundations for SoulCare, beginning with the need to turn our chairs toward each other, if we’re going to care for each other’s souls. We’ve developed a basic model for SoulCare beginning with a shared journeying reality and moving toward a glorious vision. We’ve talked about God’s provisions for SoulCare in the New Covenant and how we can practice the provisions of a New Covenant by relating in particular ways to each other. And finally, we’ve spent our time thinking about the ministry of spiritual direction and spiritual friendship.

I began this course with a vision—with a vision of people struggling well together in their journey to God, and I end it with an encouragement. You can provide SoulCare for at least one other person, and one who receives SoulCare will want to provide it to another. One person at a time: That’s how the revolution will spread until the church becomes a soul-caring community of spiritual friends and spiritual directors.

Discussion Questions

Why does Dr. Crabb suggest that the group hold off personal sharing until after time in the Word?

Describe, in your own words, the goals and activities of each of the following aspects of an intentional spiritual formation small group:

- Sacrament of Delight
- Discipline of Truth
- Opportunity to Hear
- Call to Community
- Emergence of Vision
- The PAPA Prayer
- The Fellowship of the Table

How might you incorporate such goals in a small group?