

THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 5: CONNECTING

Jeremiah 2:13-19, John 4:9-14, 7:37-39 (NASB)

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31 October 2010

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Dr. Larry Crabb is a Christian psychologist, author, therapist, lecturer, and college professor. He does seminars on marriage and family. He has recently been promoting the crucial place of Christian community for the health of the soul. One would expect that Dr. Crabb would have a picture perfect family. Surely his marriage must be terrific--he knows all those good principles of marriage! Surely his children must have grown up happy and holy with nary a ripple of trouble.

And yet his older son, Kep, lived the classic story of youthful rebellion, lasting from age fourteen to twenty. Larry and Rachael Crabb had run their home like a discipleship boot camp, with every possible investment in the spiritual lives of their children. They did all sorts of relational things, family prayer, fun stuff of all kinds, and even pumped up family devotions with an overhead projector where dad taught all the classic courses of Bible college.

While away from home one day at a seminar, right in the middle of giving a lecture on family and parenting, Larry's staff member got a fateful call from Rachael. When the lecture was over, Crabb learned that Kep, in the fulfillment of six years of stiff-necked rebellion, had gotten himself expelled from Taylor University in his junior year. Before he could leave to pick up Kep and all his things from Taylor, Crabb had to do one more lecture--on parenting! He had listened to Kep in his wayward years, prayed for him, and invested in him. When Kep did not conform to dad's and mom's expectations, they leaned on him really hard. His rebellion had generated not only disappointment, but a great sense of anger which colored every part of their family relationship.

But at that particular culminating failure, Larry and Rachael sensed, through their tears, that God was giving them an opportunity. In his book entitled *Connecting*, Crabb relates how he prayed: "Lord, I've done everything I know to do. I've not reached my son. And I can't reach him now. I don't know how to do it. But I'm not asking for instructions. I'm asking you to let him see Christ in me" (*Connecting*, Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1997, p. 4). When he met Kep at school, he discovered that he felt no anger. He didn't have to control his temper. He didn't lecture Kep. He simply said: "How can I help?" He later wrote: "The father who so many times before *demanded* repentance angrily, manipulatively, self-dependently, now *invited* repentance" (*Connecting*, p. 5).

And within a short time, Kep's life began to change. He came home like the prodigal son, welcomed by his dad instead of rebuked, and concluded that he had been going the wrong way for a long time. A dramatic family healing began which changed the very way they related to one another. Crabb wrote: "That was a turning point in Kep's life. Why? What happened? ...Something came out of me that cut through Kep's hardness and reached the tender part of his soul with healing power" (*Connecting*, p. 5). That experience sent Crabb in pursuit of the answer. What was it that unlocked the process of Kep's transformation into a healthy soul? As always, we will never find a reliable answer to any question about the human soul without attending to what the Maker of All says about it, so we turn to the Bible.

DISCONNECTED FROM THE SOURCE OF LIFE

If we want to know how make our souls healthy we have to know why they are not healthy to begin with. One very powerful word about it was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. In prophesying against the straying of the nation Israel from her God, he wrote as the very mouthpiece of Yahweh Elohim, the Lord their God: **"For My people have committed two evils: /They have forsaken Me, /The fountain of living waters, /To hew for themselves cisterns, /Broken cisterns that can hold no water"** (Jeremiah 2:13). Jeremiah went on to make sure they knew that the reason the violent judgment of God was upon them was for abandoning him: **"Have you not done this to yourself /By your forsaking the LORD your God /When He led you in the way? /But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt, /To drink the waters of the Nile? /Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria, /To drink the waters of the Euphrates? /Your own wickedness will correct you, /And your apostasies will reprove you; /Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter /For you to forsake the LORD your God, /And the dread of Me is not in you,' declares the Lord GOD of hosts"** (Jeremiah 2:17-19).

We could also have turned to the story of Adam and Eve to learn that we have unhealthy souls because we have forsaken **"the fountain of living waters"** and sought to dig our own cisterns, which, by definition, can hold no water. God is the fountain! What Israel did would be like us saying: "I didn't want to be controlled by the Federal Reserve so I abandoned money which comes from the US Mint and printed my own." It gets worse! When we find that our souls are still parched after rejecting living water, we search desperately over the surface of the earth, like Israel did, to find any way to quench our thirst. Israel went down to Egypt to drink from the Nile, and to Assyria to drink from the Euphrates. They tried other gods and other humanly-devised methods of seeking a healthy soul. It is not the fear of the Lord which drives us away from him, but the lack of that healthy fear.

Nobody really wants to face the meaning of the cross: We are all so broken that Christ had to die for us. So those apart from Christ will try every possible spiritual path except the one that leads to the cross. And this is even true among those who call themselves Christians. Many have concluded that what they need is a good feeling, and so they pursue that. There are many Christians today who have invested in certain religious practices which please them. Others are following the path of bigness—they will only go to big concerts, big churches, and read best-selling Christian books. Disconnection from God has many faces, and there are so many empty cisterns.

This explains so much! We are all like the Israelites who were offered a concrete opportunity to quench the thirst of their parched souls through a faith connection to Yahweh God, but they turned it down in order to be independent. Even though they found that it is **"evil and bitter"** to forsake the Lord, the seductive intoxication of sinful independence from him kept them running away. In short, the biggest problem of every person is that we all, because of sin, are disconnected from God and the life which is found only in him.

LIFE ITSELF FOUND BY CONNECTION TO GOD

Christ no doubt had this in mind as he encountered the Samaritan woman at the well. He was a Jewish man who normally would not speak to any woman to whom he was not related in public. Beyond that, a Jewish man would never speak to Samaritans who were considered dogs. But Christ's

entire earthly ministry turned on the fact that the people of the whole world are cut off from the fountain of living waters and need to be reconnected. When he asked this woman for a drink, he also did a third thing no Jewish man would do, namely, drink from an unsanctified Samaritan vessel. The well was deep, and he had no vessel of his own to draw.

We pick up the story there in John 4:9-14: **"Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.' She said to Him, 'Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?' Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life'"** (John 4:7-14).

Jesus Christ came to bring the solution to our biggest problem. By reconnecting to God through faith in him, we can find health for our souls. Our parched souls can be flooded by his living waters as they were meant to be. The picture of living water makes better sense to those in cultures with no modern water supply. If you normally drink directly from outdoor water sources your first choice is what the Hebrews called living--or moving--water. You would always pick a clean, bubbling spring over a river. You would pick a river over a lake. You would pick a lake over a pond, and you would pick a clear pond over a smelly and dangerous stagnant pool. The clear lake and pond have moving water due to an input and output stream. And to be clear for modern folks like us, a well is a type of artificial spring. It is fresh because the aquifer underground moves and purifies the water. In fact, the Romans designed a fresh water supply system in Herculaneum that never stopped moving in order to keep it clean and fresh.

That is what the life which is found only in God does for our souls. He supplies us with a never-ending source of freshness, cleansing, and health. When we meet Christ, as the Samaritan woman did, the life of God begins to flow into us over our new connection to him, the fountain of living waters.

Dr. Larry Crabb, the man whose story I told in the introduction, is a controversial figure in Christian circles. The work of a psychologist is helping people find health for their souls, and for that he is beloved by many. He is rejected by others for "plundering the Egyptians" and using ideas from secular psychology. Like all of us, he is a man on a journey. He began his career as a Christian who nevertheless based his work primarily on secular psychology as can be seen in his early works. But the book *Connecting*, from which the opening story is taken, reveals a profound discovery that getting people connected to God the Father, the fountain of living waters, through faith in Christ the Son is the only thing which can truly bring health to the human soul.

He goes out of his way to explain that while secular psychology teaches that a deep connecting between people and the experience of acceptance is all that we need, there can be no health for the soul without the work of Christ. He uses Carl Rogers, the father of secular therapy based on human reconnection, to draw this key distinction. Crabb writes: "Rogers sees no need for the atonement. In his mind, there is no sin to forgive. Christians believe that without the atonement there is no forgiveness,

without forgiveness there is no connection, and without connection there is the loneliness of hell forever. But we must be equally quick to teach that with the atonement there is forgiveness, with forgiveness there is connection..." (*Connecting*, p. 46). And with connection to God there is health for the soul.

I wish I could say that this settles the matter, but there are some angry Christians with web sites who say that no one should read Crabb or listen to any pastor who reads him. They are, in fact, openly promoting disconnection among brothers and sisters in Christ--a stunning example of what it means to have an unhealthy soul! This is something God says he hates: "**...One who spreads strife among brothers**" (Proverbs 6:19). God never said that connecting with other Christians would be easy. He said that it would be holy, true, and healthy.

LIVING WATERS IN US MINISTER LIFE

By definition, the movement of living water, the life of God, cannot stop with us or it becomes stagnant and stale. Christ explained, as recorded a little further in John's gospel, that the living water bursts out of the believer to minister life to others. He went to the biggest Jewish holy celebration in Jerusalem to speak these words: "**If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified**" (John 7:37b-39).

The reviving of our souls with living water was never meant to stop with us. From within those who have received the Holy Spirit the life of God bursts out like a spring bursts from a mountainside to quench the thirst of anyone who is willing to drink. And it is our human relational connections over which the life of God flows to others. It is not we who minister life but the Holy Spirit within us.

Dr. Crabb's son Kep had a *kairos* moment to "**taste and see that the Lord is good.**" That taste came when his dad showed up to pick him up from the school from which he had been expelled, and instead of being lectured, he was loved. Why did the very power of God bubble out from within Larry Crabb and touch his son? Because it is, as Paul wrote to the Romans, "**...the kindness of God [that] leads [us] to repentance**" (Romans 2:4b). Remember that the guiding effect of the word of God had already been given years earlier during Kep's instruction at home. He already had the guidance that he needed. Now there was no anger from his parents but the direct experience of "**...the riches of [God's] kindness and tolerance and patience...**" (Romans 2:4a).

That is what Christ came to display when he came to earth in the form of a man. He did not push the dirty sinners away but sought to connect with them. He did not thunder judgment but spoke the most unexpected words: "How can I help you? Do you need deliverance from demons? Do you need healing in your body? I know you need forgiveness of sins. I can do that."

That is the character of the Holy Spirit within us who will touch others if we are willing to connect with them. What a privilege! I remember a pastoral visit I made to a struggling young couple who had attended our church a few times. I knocked on their apartment door and when the wife opened the door she seemed very surprised to see me. The husband was not at home, so I did not go in, but we had a nice chat in the hallway, I prayed for them briefly, and then left. It did not seem like it was very significant. Yet when the couple came to church that next Sunday the wife remarked about the visit: "It

seemed like God showed up!" If so, it was surely not about me. But whenever we bring the bubbling spring of the Holy Spirit with us to minister to others, it really is God showing up!

Ask yourself: Am I all about connecting or disconnecting? Is the energy of my life directed at making relationships or cutting them off? Name the people in your life who are struggling, with whom you have damaged relationships, or who are in rank rebellion against God. It will not help for you to yell at them to do better or speak words of judgment about their foolish self-destructive behavior. Does your heart break because there is a disconnection between you and others in your family: a child, husband, wife, or parent? What about disconnections you have with fellow believers in Christ? What will you do to repair these?

Make sure you have restored the health of your own soul by rejecting the many cisterns which hold no water and instead drinking in Christ, the fountain of living waters. Then choose, by the work of the Holy Spirit within you, to connect with them and speak "**kindness, tolerance, and patience**" into them. By so doing you are embracing your role as a conduit for the living water of God to flow to others as he intended. And if this is the case, then we should be actively inviting people into our lives, and seeking repair for broken relationships with others. Your effectiveness for Christ depends upon it, and so does their eternity.

You may be hearing or reading this message and thinking: *Pastor, I have never drunk from the spring of living water because I have not yet come to God.* Your first step is to admit to God that you are a sinner, receive the atonement for your sins which was bought for you on the cross by Christ, and then you have the wonderful opportunity to drink in the living water of God—his very eternal life given to you as a gift.

You know that you are thirsty. Come and drink.