

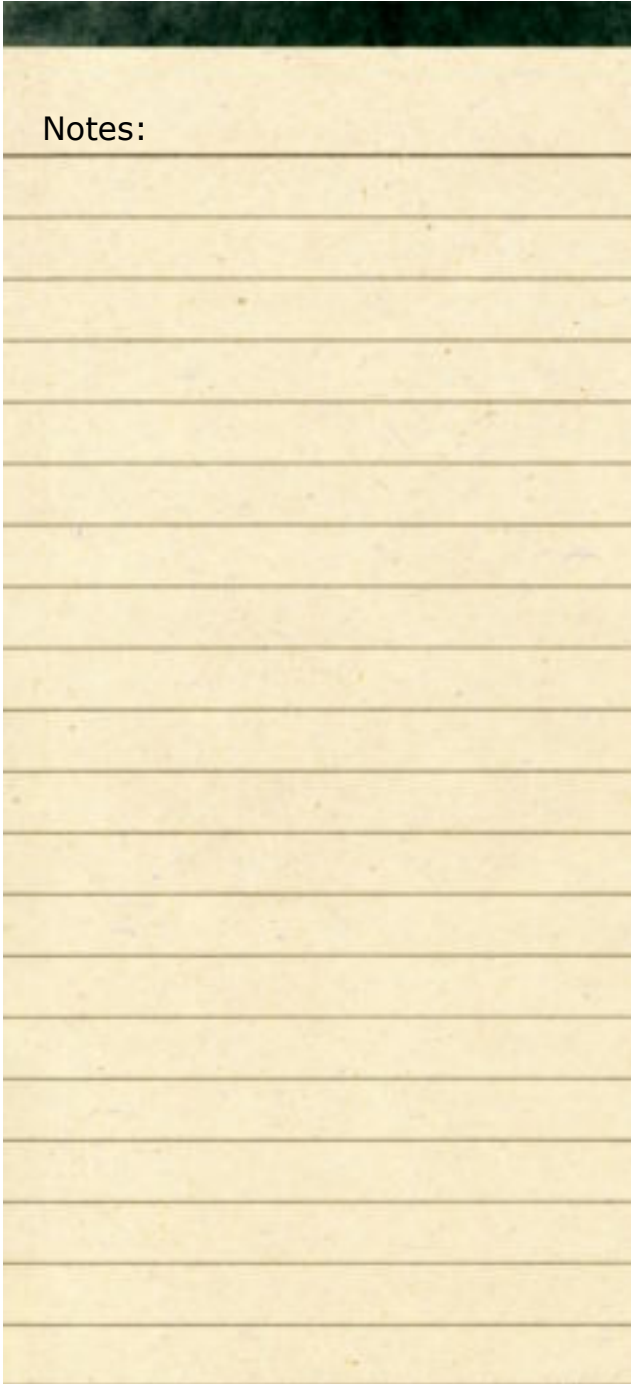
## Mental Health Roundtable

**Mart:** Let's talk about the mysterious relationship between the body, the mind, the spirit, the soul. It probably raises questions that all of us have, but let's say I come to you, for example, and I say you know what you've got a pastor, you've got a counselor, I can't stop washing my hands and some people think it's funny, but I can't stop washing my hands. I mean, there's a Bible there. I believe in God. I mean, it sounds foolish and I've got a friend who just keeps pulling out her hair and it embarrasses her. She can't stop. She can't figure out if it's, you know, is it something spiritual? She tries to ask God, God please stop. Help me to stop pulling out my hair.

I've got another friend who goes through these huge swings and sometimes you say wow he's just full of energy. It's crazy. He's creative. Other times he just sinks into the deepest, deepest, dark depression. He cries out and he feels like he's oppressed and he doesn't know what to do. Our world is full of those kinds of things, isn't it? And what do we do if somebody says what do I need? Do I need a pastor? Do I need a counselor? Where do I begin? Where would you men . . . how can we talk about this in a meaningful way?

**Larry:** You know the classical way of thinking about symptoms is to divide them between organic and functional. We talk about a functional disorder verses an organic disorder; you're talking about something that has a function that serves a purpose that may be unconscious, and until that purpose is exposed, you don't deal with the symptom. You talked about OCD—obsessive

Notes:



compulsive disorder—washing hands and that sort of a thing. I recall a woman who I worked with who was a hand washer and she would wash her hands obsessively before she would serve dinner to her family because a germ might get off of her hands into the food and kill her family and she'd be responsible for the death of her family. When she would drive down in her car, if she saw any can on the road she'd stop and pick it up because she would say suppose somebody comes along and hits the can and it causes a flat tire and they kill somebody. Now the interesting thing as we begin talking about it, okay, the idea of functional disorder, this was not organic; this was functional.

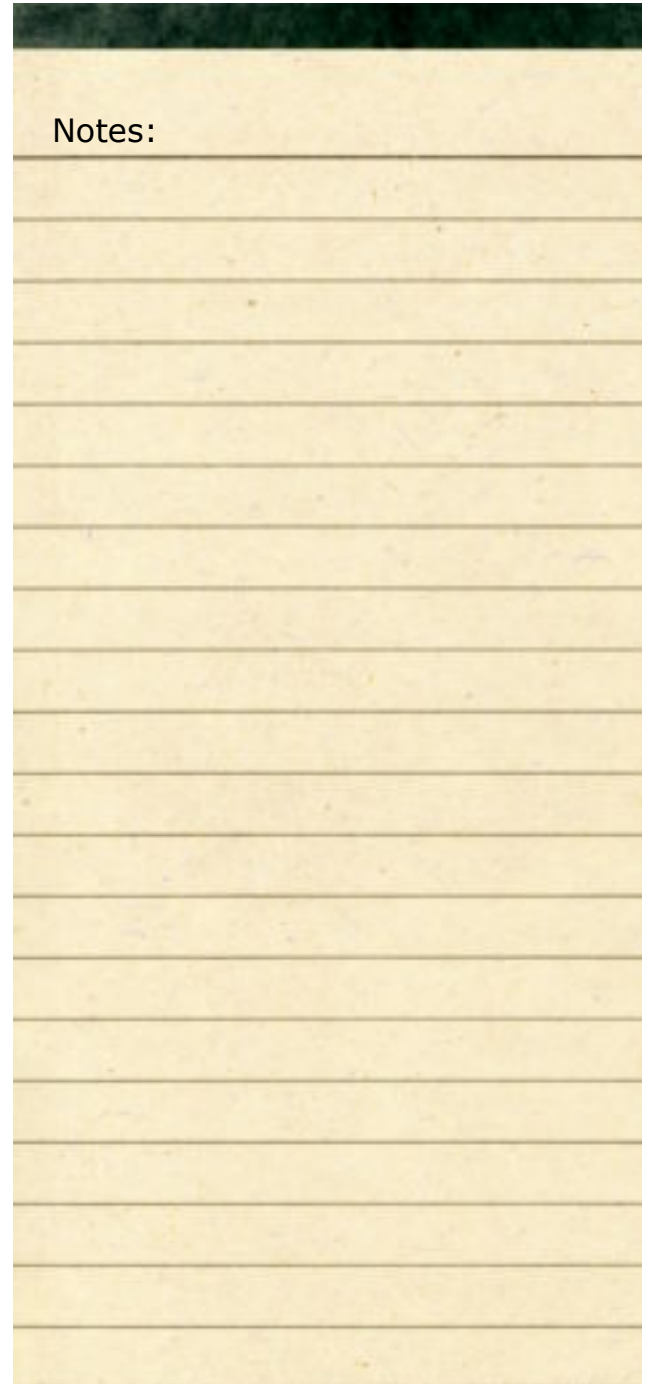
**Mart:** You're saying it has a purpose?

**Larry:** It has a purpose and the purpose became clear when the only person that she was serving dinner to was her husband, she wouldn't wash her hands. I mean think about it. She was so angry at her husband. There was a hatred for her husband that in the core of her soul that's what she was wrestling with and when we began to expose the function of her disorder then the symptoms were able to clear up.

Now there are other cases where it's not functional, it's organic.

**Mart:** Meaning it's in the chemistry.

**Larry:** A physiological problem. It's in brain chemistry.



It's a neurological problem and in that case the pastor or the psychologist has nothing to offer, essentially. It's an organic problem like diabetes, like cancer, and you need to get a physician to prescribe medication for it. But I think it's important in dealing with whether it's hand washing, whether it's the bi-polar disorder you're referring to—the creative genius, the excitement, the up phase, the manic phase or the way down, deep depressive stage—that while it is certainly appropriate to take medication for these kinds of things to deal with the symptoms, it's always wise to sit back and say I wonder what I'm accomplishing with these symptoms? Because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and there's something within me that wants to manage life without God. I'm going to find some way to get rid of my pain and God is not helping so I'm going to make a point of doing it, and the hand washing can be a part of that but the function is the issue. That's why begin . . .

**Mart:** But it could be an organic thing as well?

**Larry:** It could be an organic thing as well, but the difficulty with that is contrary to popular opinion, and I think this is accurate, there really are very few, if any, literally scientific tests, empirical tests, blood work, pet scans this kind of thing.

**Mart:** That can really sort it out.

Notes:

**Larry:** Getting closer to that and some psychiatrists now are thinking that there's more evidence in pet scans to determine this is an organic disorder and I praise the Lord for that. If we can get good medical treatment procedures and diagnostic procedures to say your depression is caused by this brain chemistry, this pill will take care of the brain chemistry, my thought is great, take the pill.

**Mart:** Okay so that's the counselor speaking who understands his Bible.

**Larry:** A little bit.

**Mart:** Joe, they come to hear a president of the university, a Christian university. You have students I'm sure who are struggling. You've been pastor of churches where you've had people . . . Have you seen these kinds of things walk through the door?

**Joe:** Yeah, absolutely and I think my concern is the reaction of the community of belief to those who struggle with these kinds of things. It's a wide continuum—resistance, withdrawal, on the side . . .

**Mart:** You mean in the community.

**Joe:** Yeah, you know, like I don't know how to deal with this so

Notes:

I'm not going to encounter it. Someone like that walks into the church and people don't want to sit in the same pew. People think they're distracting. People fear them. Sometimes, sadly, people joke about them, about, you know, Mrs. So-and-so sitting in the second row. My feeling is that the community of belief needs to embrace these people. You know I'm not where Larry is in terms of understanding all the intricacies of it. I just know that we're all frail. There's a delicate balance. There's not one of us that couldn't go over that tipping point and wrestle with some of these exact same things. I was thinking about Jesus one time when he was crossing the sea with his disciples and a terrible storm comes up. Now those days they felt like the demons lived in the depths of the sea so this was an encounter with the demonic supernatural realities for the disciples. No wonder they were so fearful and the boat pulls up on the shore and Jesus heads for the graveyard which was totally out of bounds for any Jewish person to minister to a demoniac who was there naked ripping his own flesh. You can't think of a more polarized moment for the followers of Jesus Christ having come across the sea in the storm and Jesus moves with compassion to the demoniac and I just think that's an example for how we as Jesus-followers should embrace these people. I think it would be the most wonderful picture in the world if in a church gathering there were some people who were struggling with mental disorders and the church was embracing them and loving them and praying for them.

**Mart:** And sometimes we do see that happening. But don't you

Notes:

think too that it's when it happens in your own family, that's when it really opens up your heart. I don't know how many people I've talked to whose daughter or son or wife or parent and, you know, were struggling with something that just nobody knew what to do with. There didn't seem to be any spiritual answers. One of the reasons I feel this so strongly is my wife and I, early in our marriage, had . . . we have a close relative, an older family member struggling with profound delusions, spending much of her life in mental institutions around the United States who was a part of our life for many years until she died in a state hospital. In the middle of that there was a spiritual decision. She got better for a while. I mean significantly better; and then she slipped back into it again until these wild thoughts and fears of us, and felt like we were trying to kill her, cut off her nose. I mean this stuff was real and we felt like we were just caught in the middle of something we didn't know what to do with and the God who seemed to help her for a while stopped making the difference.

**Joe:** Mart did you ever sense a withdrawal like I can't help, like I don't understand? I guess what concerns me is when our compassion for these people dies. You know, did you ever stop being driven by that sense of love and compassion because of their actions?

**Mart:** We were frightened. We were confused. We were embarrassed. We were broken by it but you know what, when it's a close family member, it's you. It's somebody you desperately

Notes:

love and I think that's when . . . and after that . . . I began to realize how many people in our own church community had family members that was kind of like in the closet. It was like other people didn't understand why this son or daughter acted out the way they did and then other parents would come and say now, I've got a son who . . . It's all among us but it's kind of like it's in the closet because some people feel shame. Why isn't God fixing this?

**Larry:** And shame isn't the only problem there. There's terror and the terror is not simply a matter of well it might happen to me, that might be there to some degree, but the terror I think is to some degree born out of an assumption that we make that God is supposed to be doing something about this kind of thing and when he doesn't, then what kind of a God do we serve. Then we're terrified that we're alone in the universe with a very undependable God, who when really bad things happen, he doesn't seem to be of much help. That's where faith gets really shaken and I think we need to maybe face the fact that God doesn't seem to be committed to what we think he should be committed to. Like my financial prosperity, like my emotional health, like my physical health, cause if he's committed to that, he's doing a rather poor job so he must be committed to something else. Therefore I have to say when my relative, when my friend is desperately mentally ill and paranoid and going through all these things, you need to recognize that psychiatry is still a rather infant science, and I'm talking about psychiatry as

Notes:

a medical specialty, that we just simply don't know the answers to these questions. There are drugs that help. There are strong drugs that make a difference. There are psychiatric hospitals that can keep a person from hurting themselves and all those things have a place and are good, but we really don't have the resources to solve all the problems that come along and then we somehow assume well, God is supposed to take up the slack and when he doesn't, then we have to say, no, the purpose of life is not to make life work. The purpose of life is not to make life better. Now that's a rather radical thought but it's true. The purpose of life is rather to reveal the character of God in any situation we find ourselves and that's something I want to comment to you. You said that wouldn't it be something the church should move toward people and of course, amen a 1000 percent to that but why don't we want to? Rather than you should, why don't we want to move toward the schizophrenic who comes to church on Sunday morning?

At our church we have a schizophrenic, a fellow that walks up and down the aisles during the service. It's a small church, 120 people and he walks up and down the aisles and stops and hugs everybody. Well what do we do with that? I love the fact that our church doesn't, you know, say how do we get rid of this guy? We hug him back and when he hugs us, we miss part of the service.

**Joe:** He sets a pretty good example, you know, hugging a lot more in church would be a good thing wouldn't it. Not a bad

Notes:

thing.

**Larry:** That's not a bad thing and then the question is why don't we want to? I know we should but why don't we want to?

**Joe:** Why do you think we don't want to?

**Larry:** I think we're scared to death that if we move into the reality, a world that is unmanageable, whether it's a schizophrenic in our church or a relative who thinks we're cutting off her nose, if we move into a reality of a world that we can't manage and God isn't helping, then our faith is going to be shaken to the core as opposed to saying this world is not going to be solved. The economic crises might or might not go away. The cancer might not be healed. The job might not be recovered. The schizophrenic might not find medication to make her normal again. These things might not happen so God what can we count on you for? We can count on you to reveal your compassion in this situation and when you start realizing that's what we're called to, there's something in my soul and your soul that goes I want to do that.

**Joe:** You know, Larry, I fully agree that ultimately it's a big God issue and I'd like to talk about that, but I think one of the reasons we don't want to is not so much about God, but about us; because it's going to disrupt our lives, you know, life is no longer all about me. I don't know how to deal with that.

Notes:

**Larry:** It's a God issue.

**Joe:** I'm going to have to spend time with that. It starts with the me issue in it. I don't know if I want to enter that arena. It will disrupt my life.

**Mart:** It's a huge issue.

**Joe:** Yeah and I think that's one of the reasons we don't want to. Ultimately it is a God issue.

**Larry:** Yeah, certainly it's about me and I want to make sure my life works really well, but that's the reason that tendency is so strong. The reason I don't want my life disrupted is because that's what I think life is really all about and God ought to cooperate. And when I realize God is not cooperating with that then I realize that it's not about me and then I realize that if I really am a Christian who wants to serve whoever this God is, that maybe the issue is not to keep my life comfortable. Maybe the issue is not to keep myself from feeling terror and being inconvenienced by a schizophrenic individual.

**Joe:** It's the old take-up-your-cross-and-follow-me, you know, Jesus walked into some very uncomfortable and disconcerting moments and environments and if we're true followers of him, it's not about us. It's about serving other people but I do think that's one of the things that cuts off our want. I just don't know if

Notes:

I want to bother with this kind thing.

**Mart:** There are all kinds of emotions. I think there's disillusionment, there's anger, there's people, you know, . . . Larry what if I told you that I've listened to Joe's chapels. I used to visit his churches. This isn't true, okay. What if I came and said, you know, . . .

**Larry:** You don't listen to his chapels?

**Mart:** I used to go to Joe's chapels and I used to sit in his congregations and you know what? I always had the sense if I just had more faith, Joe opened up his Bible and gave the impression that if only my schizophrenic relative would believe in God the demons would flee and she'd be fine again, you know, or my depression . . . when I can't stop washing . . . if I'm going to believe God, everything would be fixed and I get so angry with Joe. And then I get so disillusioned. I thought you know what? The last thing in the world I want to do is have anything to do with this book. The last thing in the world I want to do is have anything to do with pastors or churches or Christian assemblies.

**Joe:** You know I think that's a terrible notion about God, as Larry said. You know, and unfortunately it's fanned by some of these evangelists that we see globally who tell us if you'd have enough faith God will make you rich and healthy and solve all your problems and make you happy.

Notes:

**Mart:** Sure, God never changes. Jesus did it. Jesus will do it today for you. Right?

**Joe:** Yeah. But I think what we have to realize is that we see life in a freeze frame moment but the reality is that the totality of life is a full-length film that goes far beyond our moment and God is the executive producer of that full-length film. That's where faith comes in. In this moment why don't you intervene? Why aren't you here? Why aren't you helping me and he's—like I would say to a child—hang on, you know, I am going to. Just hang on; wait there because ultimately in the end, God is the ultimate resolver of all of these things and he has to, as we've mentioned in other times together, he has to navigate in a fallen world, in an imperfect world where there is hurt and disappointment. He has determined that in the end, as the executive producer of our full-length film, we will all worship and rejoice in him for his goodness and his character.

**Larry:** So Joe what is good now? Is the goodness of God limited to what we're told to wait for, or is there any goodness that's available to us now, as Mart wrestles with the schizophrenic relative, as I wrestle with all of my stuff? What can I count on God for now? Is it more than just, I don't want to say just because it's huge, that the end of the story is good but what can I hang on to now? Just waiting, or is there something present?

Notes:

**Joe:** No I think there's something wonderful in the now. You know where I say heal my relative or heal me, but if it's a relative, perhaps God wants us to break out of our shell and follow him into that person's life as a servant and it's amazing the things that begin to change in our hearts and our lives. You know we have to recognize that God brings things into our lives for our benefit. James chapter 1—to refine us. Many times I've heard people who have people with mental disorders living in their own home, a down syndrome child who will tell you at the end of it all our family is far better and far different today because of that experience, so I think that's one of the things I would find hope in. Instead of withdrawing myself, get busy about caring and loving and compassion because that opens the doors to some phenomenal realities that change in my life and the rewards can be well worth the investment.

**Larry:** You know when we talk about the difference between organic disorders and functional disorders certainly with organic disorders medications, psychiatry, neurology has a legitimate place, but in any disorder whether it's functional or organic, that the root is always going to involve some sort of a dysfunction in relationship, some sort of a separation, some sort of a lack of the kind of relationship that the Trinity enjoys with each other.

**Mart:** God within himself.

**Larry:** God within himself. The transcendence of a God that is

Notes:

a small group. The only small group at this time that gets along really well. And the way they get along is the way we're called to get along. So when you have a schizophrenic relative, what Joe was saying is right on target in my mind, that when I'm called to, the goodness now, is that I can reveal the relationality of God by how I relate to this person. I can move into the demoniac's world. I can visit the mental patient in the hospital—and I've done a lot of that, actually—and I have sat with life-long schizophrenics and I don't know how to cure them. The psychiatrists have no cure for them but I can sit there and actually care, and it's amazing that there are moments when the relationality that sometimes rarely, I wish more frequently, God has empowered me to offer has produced a moment of lucidity. Now is it a cure? Of course not. But it tells me that the day is coming when relationships are going to be perfect and the goodness now is I can reveal the relationality of God, the character of God in the way I relate to my schizophrenic relative or that fellow that wants to hug me in the middle of a good point in the sermon that I don't want to miss. I can say, well what does it mean to be like Jesus, because I think the one thing God is up to now, it certainly isn't making this world a better place. I mean I think it's right to do all we can to make this world a better place, don't minimize that, the whole missional emphasis is legitimate, but the central thing that God's power is committed to is making me more like his Son—spiritual formation. That's what he's after and my schizophrenic relative is an opportunity for me to become the more spiritually formed. My wife who has an affair, my husband who's a pornographer,

Notes:

my child who's got Down syndrome, whatever the case might be, everything is an opportunity for me to be spiritually formed. That can sound like pie in the sky. That can sound like religious rhetoric, or it's true. Now if it's true, it's everything.

**Joe:** Mart, do you think this part of our struggle is this innate sense that we despise suffering?

**Larry:** It's unfair.

**Joe:** Yeah, but from God's point of view, he has been willing to move into a world of suffering and use suffering for greater ends instead of just eliminating it all. We live in a peaceful world and a happy world and we're all floating around in our little happy bubbles that he realizes like surgery, if the doctor says to you, you need surgery, and you say will it hurt? Will it be uncomfortable and he says, well, yeah. It will be. Well I'm not going to do it then. No. You say I'll go through it for a better end and that God has been willing to use suffering for greater, bigger ends. I think that someone who really wants to come to grips with this has to stop despising suffering and begin to cooperate with God's work in the midst of suffering. I think, as Larry has said, that's moving into the suffering with the grace and the love and the compassion of Jesus Christ to bring other healings besides physical healing or mental healing. Maybe it's a soul healing that will happen. We're more than just mind and body as you said, so I think we just have to change our mind about suffering when we look at it from God's point of view.

Notes: