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**Presentation Transcript**  
**Human Nature – Good or Bad? Part 2**  
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(The following presentation is titled *Human Nature – Good or Bad? Part 2*. If you missed the first part of this presentation, the easiest way to hear it is download it from our Website at [www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org).)

I'm working right now with a boy who's eleven. He's in middle school. He's chewed his fingernails down to the bloody quick – all of them. He got failing grades last year. His story is that two years ago his mother died of breast cancer and his stepfather didn't want him. His stepfather was pretty abusive and his mother was neglectful. He and his brother are *way* behind in study skills and social skills and all that, because they never got taught anything. They live way out in the middle of nowhere. She was homeschooling them, supposedly, but she never really taught them anything. So they're way behind.

He learned how to survive in his environment by becoming really manipulative. I've been seeing him for several months now. It's not just me who has been seeing him. There's been a whole team of people at our clinic that have been working with him. He has a home coach that goes to his home. He's got a school coach that goes to school with him. His grandmother, whom he's living with, gets to do family therapy. He and his brother both have individual therapists. So he's up to A's and B's this year. And his fingernails are notbleeding any longer.

What exactly is it that I'm doing as his individual therapist? Well, what I'm doing is I'm providing a healing relational field for him. He comes in once a week, and we play games, and talk, and he does art. He knows that in that environment he can say or do anything and I'm not going to judge him, or look down on him, or correct him. Parents can't do that, because they have to hold boundaries. But in that little office, there's not too much trouble he can get into, so I don't have to impose a lot of rules. I think the only rule we have is "Nobody can get hurt and nothing can get broken." After that, anything he wants to say or do, he can do, and I'm not going to put him down for it. So, he comes in week after week and I'm literally watching him heal himself, because his mind has the capacity in it, given by God, to overcome his grief and his anxiety that he's experiencing. You know, when you chew your fingernails down to the quick, that's anxiety. And I'm

watching this happen as I play with him and just hold whatever he has in that space. That's a part of human nature that we don't think much about, but it's all good, isn't it. That's great – that we have the ability to do that, given the right environment.

Okay, now you know I've left something out, haven't I? The Bible says that there's a lot of bad stuff about human nature. We read four scriptures related to that in the beginning. How does that fit in with all the good stuff?

Let's go to Romans 7, verse 18. This is a powerful verse. I left this one off the bad list in the beginning.

**Rom. 7:18** – *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not, but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* Now, isn't this a contradiction? Other places tell us that the body can be used for good and evil, and that it was all good when God made it. We saw that even our sexual organs are given high-level spiritual honor. So what's the deal? You know, it's a pretty powerful thing when you say, "in my flesh dwells no good thing." So what is the deal?

Well, it's a different word. This is not *soma* he's talking about. This is *sarx* – whole different thing. Nothing in the *sarx* is good. That's where all the bad stuff comes from. It's almost like God's telling us that we have different components to our mind. Well, He always has – you know, heart, soul, mind. We have compartments in ourself – different parts of ourself – our psyche. And the *sarx* is where all the bad stuff comes from – the unnatural affection, the selfishness, the lying, the disrespect for God and others, the anger, the arrogance, the jealousy, the lust for power, control over others – all of that. That's where it comes from.

But what is that thing called *sarx*? Where does it come from? Was it there when God made us? Did He put that in us? Before we answer that question, let's take a little time out and go to Hebrews 4:12.

**Heb. 4:12** – *For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Do you believe that? I do. I believe that in the Bible it explains how we work – the difference between flesh and spirit, motive, good and bad – all that. I also know that all this new brain research is pouring concrete around what the Bible says, too. It's amazing!

Genesis 2. Let's go back and finish the story. After everything that was good, something else happened, didn't it?

**Gen. 2:21** – *The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept. And He took up one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, He made into a woman. And He brought her to the man. Adam*

said, *“This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.”* Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. So everything was fine. It was peachy – harmony, love, unselfishness, no consideration about evil. I doubt that he even knew what it was. They just knew everything was good. And they had a good relationship with God. They had good jobs and a great place to live. And my friend, Rick, says, “It’s all good!” That’s how it was.

But then, Genesis 3, verse 1.

**Gen. 3:1** – *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’”* And you know, Eve was not stupid. She corrected him, didn’t she? *She said, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”* She got it, didn’t she? She got it the first time. *And then the serpent said to the woman, “Come on. You’re not gonna die! You will not surely die. He’s just joshing ya! That’s not really true! For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good from evil.”*

Now, was that tree a bad thing? It wasn’t, was it? You know, Paul said that to be able to tell the difference between good and evil was what made you spiritually mature, didn’t he? (Hebrews 5)

**V-6** – *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave to her husband with her and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And then the LORD God called to Adam, and said to him, “Where are you?”* And he said, *“I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”*

So, for the first time in his life he’s afraid. And he’s afraid of *God* because of what he did. He’s feeling guilty, isn’t he, and afraid. He experiencing anxiety.

**V-11** – *And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded that you should not eat?”* And the man said, *“The woman, whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate.”* So, a few verses ago, he was saying, “This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...yippee! yahoo!” and now he’s blaming her for the problem. I mean the question was, “Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to?” The answer to that question is, “Yes.”

**V-13** – *And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “Well, the serpent deceived me and I ate.”*

**V-16** – *And to the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception” – I’m in verse 16 now. “In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you.” And then to Adam He said, “Because you heeded the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.*

**V-18** – *“Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”*

A *profound* change takes place here. Not only will they be cast out of this idyllic garden, and no longer be under the loving favor of God, but they will now have to face the hostile environment that they’re going to have to battle all their lives if they want to survive. We wonder if that part about *returning* to the ground was a change, too, don’t we? But we don’t know – at least, *I* don’t know – the answer to that question.

But something else happened, too. They were very defensive in blaming each other all of a sudden. They were feeling this guilt and shame. And they were suddenly alienated from God. They felt anxiety for the first time, because they had never done anything before then to produce any. And it breached faith with God, didn’t it? They did something that they knew He didn’t want them to do. All the bad aspects of human nature – Paul said were in the *sarx* – we see in Adam and Eve all of a sudden. Right? I mean, that’s what this story is for, isn’t it? It’s to show us how it all happened and how it started. And so we see all the bad aspects of human nature in their behavior. Then it just went from bad to worse, didn’t it? Those two people saw one of their sons kill the other.

How did the devil do that? How did he do that? What happened? What did he do? Did he wave a magic wand and make them evil? Does the devil really have the power to change their nature after God created it good? I remember that scripture in Jeremiah, where it said, “Get rid of those thoughts that *lodge* in your heart.” Well, you know, we just read this account and there was no magic wand. What was it that he did? He just *talked* to them. He talked to them. He convinced them to do something that they knew they shouldn’t do. That made them feel guilty and it started that cycle. He introduced a new way of thinking to them. That’s what he did.

Eve passed it to Adam. How did she do that? She *talked* to him! That is true, isn’t it? See, the Bible is showing us right here what happened and how it happened. They weren’t evil to start. They listened to the devil and began to think like he thinks. That’s what happened. How do you suppose they passed it to Cain? Yeah, they talked to each other in front of him. And they talked to him. Kids have radar for that stuff, don’t they? So as he grew older, he caught it from them. Probably didn’t start out so bad – the little guy – right? But as he got older, he wasn’t that sweet, little, innocent kid he was anymore – that

he started out being. It takes awhile to become – what we call – carnally minded and to have a fully developed *sarx*.

While we were at Thanksgiving our three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter was up earlier than her parents. And we hadn't had breakfast yet, and she was hungry. And there was this table full of goodies leftover from Thanksgiving. She wanted a piece of candy. Instead of saying, "May I have a piece of candy," she said, "Papa Bill, did you say I could have a Tootsie Roll Pop?" Now where do you suppose she learned that approach? Part of it is her just trying to meet her own desire. She was hungry. But part of it is an attempt at craftiness, too, isn't it – using all of her three-year-old wiles to try to manipulate me into giving her something she wanted.

Did her question sound like another question we just had read to us? It does, doesn't it? "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" See how he does it? He plays on the good parts of our nature – our natural drives and desires for relationship, for inclusion – and he puts a twist on it. He distorts what's good and he confuses good and evil, so that you do have to be sharp to sort out the difference between the two of them. But the Bible sorts all that out for us. It's been very helpful to me to understand that I do have all these different aspects in me, and that there is a difference.

Am I saying that we learn human nature from each other and that's how it's passed? Well, yes and no. You know, it's always more complicated. It's never just one thing going on, is it? We *do* learn it by observation. We surely do. But it's passed another way as well. And we never really knew this until just recently.

When a baby is born, it has less wiring than most other creatures. You know, little horses can just stand up in just a few minutes. Most little animals – when they are born – they need protection, but they're nowhere near as helpless as a human infant. When a baby's born, it just can hardly do anything. It knows to cry when it's uncomfortable. It knows to look for a face. And it knows how to be cute to draw care and attention from caregivers. And after that, it's little brain doesn't have all that much. There's some genetic stuff that comes.

But here's what happens. When mother looks into those searching little eyes, and that baby coos at mother, and she coos back and talks baby talk, it's saying to the baby, "You're okay. You're loved." And that little brain begins to create what they term a *neuro map* inside the baby's head. "This is what I am like, and it's based on input from others." What they've discovered is, that what that baby learns from parents and from its environment about itself becomes deeply imbedded in the baby's brain. It becomes a part of the baby's body, because the baby's brain *is* a part of its body. And here's the amazing part. What that brain is like, including that neuro map of self, can be at least partially transmitted genetically to children. Is it *just* that the devil talked to them? No, there's more physical stuff going on than that. There *is* something that gets passed from parents to kids.

They used to talk about nature or nurture. Which causes people to be the way they are? Is it genetics, or is it environment? It's a very complex intricate dance of both of them, as it turns out. That's why God said the people are going to be cursed to the third and fourth generations, because evil parents pass on evil things, and good parents pass on good things. That goes on to the third and fourth generation, too. Do you call that nature? See, it really gets complicated when you start understanding the way things really work, and you try to use just a blanket term to cover everything.

So we're a very complex combination of our genetics and our environment. And even our genetics can be changed by the environment of our parents. It's quite possible for my granddaughter to come from the womb with the predisposition to be secure or insecure, trusting or anxious, relational or dismissing – and to even be a little tricky about how she's going to ask for a Tootsie Roll Pop maybe.

When I talk about human nature being transmitted, I'm not talking about all the drives for self-preservation as being bad, but about the distortions of those drives that come from that part of us that is defensive.

I'll give you an example of a distortion. All of us want to feel included. We're social beings. We want to be a part of things. But some people always want to also be in *control* of everybody else in the group. That's why the disciples were talking to Jesus about who was going to be the greatest. That's a twist. That doesn't have anything, really, to do with being healthy mentally, or socially, or having your social needs met. That's what the *sarx* does. It puts a twist on all that stuff.

If you think about this outlook, it explains why everybody has their own brand of carnality. Some of us have a harder time with faith than others. Some of us have a harder time with generosity than others. Some of us have a harder time being truthful than others. Some have a harder time being at peace with other people – or within ourselves. Some have a harder time being trustworthy. Some have a harder time loving other people or themselves.

Have you ever met people who were just naturally inclined toward God and church and religion? Just take to it like a duck takes to water? And then others who fight it tooth and toenail all their lives? You see that all the time.

So, when Paul said, "In my *sarx* dwells no good thing," it's quite possible that he could have accurately been talking about his body, where all that wiring is, but also about his heart that learns all of this stuff – his environment – and quite possibly *not* talking about his self-preservation and relational drives. And he could have also been thinking about his *soma* – body by God – as honorable and fit for service to God.

So what does all this mean, if we think about it this way? Well, remember the evangelical who created the flawed parenting program because he had a flawed outlook on human nature? How would this view affect our outlook and behavior? Well, here's some of the things I think about: God has given us a lot of really great inclinations that help us move

His direction. We're made that way. There isn't too much that's really bad with the way God made us at all. It's all good. We're amazing. We were not completely evil when we were born, but the product of our parents, being both good and bad – both genetically and environmentally. If we know that we don't call our kids carnal, little brats, but we teach them about both sides – you know, the good and the bad – and how to tell the difference, and to teach them to start responding to the good, and that it's possible to cleanse our hearts of evil thoughts that lodge there. We don't have to succumb to them. That's good, isn't it? That's really good.

You know, one of the biggest problems I see for the church is because we've thought that we've been bad. A lot of us have a hard time believing that we can change. People come into my office all the time and want help with change. They believe they *can!* They're very sincere about it. And they believe they *can* change. A lot of those people have a lot more belief that they can change than a lot of the people that I know in the Church of God.

Another thing I think about is that we were created for a relationship with God and He designed us with that relationship in mind. That's more natural than the devil's way. What did He say? We were created for what? Good works. Right? Not evil doing, but we were created for good works. When Adam and Eve were created, and God said, "This is good," they had within them the natural capacity – the inclination – toward doing good. They just naturally went that way, *until* they became aware of evil. So all the right drives are there. We're very predisposed to be successful with God. We have the blueprint of the family of God built into our brain. That's another way to say it. We naturally want to connect to parents, siblings, friends and God. We have a God-created body that can be used for good or evil. How we use it is the issue. But, you know, when you put the responsibility where it belongs, that's a good thing, isn't it? When we *know* that we can do the right thing if we want to, that's good. We have a lot of control – even over our nature – because a lot of our nature is how we think. And we can change distortions if we want to. Because we have the capacity to heal emotionally, we can overcome hurts so as to avoid hurting others.

I've been working with a mother, for about a year now, who wasn't able to stop being angry at her son long enough to start doing the simple parenting things as I taught her to do. She realized *she* was the problem after a few months – that she couldn't do things that other parents could do. So she's been working on becoming less angry. And she *is* becoming less angry. And every time I talk to her son, I see that he's a little bit happier and a little bit mentally healthier. She knows she can change. We do have a lot of control. We have the capacity to heal ourselves. You know why she's angry? Because she was deeply wounded by her parents when she was small. They didn't intend to. They got it from theirs. That's how it works, right? She's an adult now and she can be a different person if she wants to.

We can learn a lot about the Kingdom of God from our kids. That's another thing that we can take to heart if we think about human nature in this way. They are wonderful. They're special. They are to be loved, cared for, taught and protected. We very

desperately need to set a good example for them, because who they become depends a good deal on what they see in us.

So there you have it. Of course, that's just my thinking on the matter. When Christ comes back, He may tell me I was completely wrong – way off track. I don't know. If He does, I'll gladly admit confusion and ask to know how it really is – not a doctrinal issue for me. But this way of thinking – about how we are – seems to me to get a lot closer to what the Bible says than the way I was first taught. And more importantly, if we take this view, it produces much more Godly fruit in our lives. And that's all good.