

The Importance of Soul Care for the Criminal Justice Professional

By Matthew Gullion ('17)

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In the chasm between pain and joy, evil and good, chaos and peace stand the public servants of the criminal justice profession. These men and women perform their duties in the difficult spaces where the light of Christ confronts the darkness of sin. Though many Christian criminal justice professionals answer the call of the Lord to pursue righteousness, they must encounter destructive, sin-filled circumstances to bring restoration and redemption to victims, offenders and witnesses. Those in criminal justice are not super-human or immune from the effects of sin, so they must cultivate self-awareness in order to insulate themselves from the depravity they must face. Sadly, many of these professionals fail to care for themselves and so fall to destructive decision making, moral calamities, addiction and broken relationships.

Numerous informative articles suggest that divorce rates of criminal justice professionals, specifically law enforcement, are well over 50 percent. An April 2018 study released by the Ruderman Family Foundation reported that peace officers are more likely to die from suicide than from a line of duty death. Further research has shown that depression is prevalent in as many as 31 percent of correction officers, compared to 6.7 percent of the general public.

This research explains that because the criminal justice professional is exposed to cumulative traumatic stress, they are much more likely to develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD, if not treated, will lead to substance or alcohol abuse, broken relationships, isolation and even suicide. These tendencies can be reduced or prevented through education and awareness, which Lancaster Bible College | Capital Seminary & Graduate School is committed to doing through the class Soul Care for the Criminal Justice Professional, a course required for all criminal justice majors.

Soul Care for the Criminal Justice Professional focuses on cultivating spiritual maturity and resilience in students. In his book, "Inside Job: Doing the Work within the Work," Stephen Smith writes, "Unless we continue to do... what we know to be true, erosion will happen in our heart. We drift. We become complacent. We ignore the threat within. Like David, we find ourselves doing things we vowed to never do. We lower our guard because we're tired." In this class, students discover how their spiritual health and attentiveness directly influence all of their functions. They study practices that cover their hearts and minds with the spiritual armor, which the Holy Spirit gives them as protection from daily exposure to cumulative traumatic stress. In addition, students develop their core values with supporting scripture, predict the challenges that will oppose those values and develop a spiritual daily rhythm. Soul care is directly related to the criminal justice professional's resilience in their profession, relationships and leadership opportunities.

In many situations, the first light of hope someone experiences is someone in law enforcement, corrections, parole/probation, or legal counsel.

The criminal justice profession is not just a humbling calling but a necessary ministry. To serve in this field, one must always wrap his

heart, mind and soul in the love of God expressed in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. With this as its foundation, Soul Care for the Criminal Justice Professional then guides students to properly "unload" their stress and develop a pathway to resilience. As leaders in our communities, it is imperative that the Christian criminal justice professional "keep the faith" from the beginning to the end of each tour of duty (2 Timothy 4:7). As LBC prepares criminal justice professionals to face the challenges in this field, we must also prepare them to maintain a loving home and possibly a bi-vocational ministry. Life goes on beyond the call for service.

With 19 years of service in public safety (16 years in law enforcement and nine years as a fighter fighter/EMT), I know from personal experience about the pain and rewards that secretly await the criminal justice professional. For the last 10 years, I have also served as student pastor and pastor in local congregations. Through my years of experience, I have seen the unthinkable, experienced the unspeakable and been exposed to the unfathomable. Each passing crisis reveals two truths: God is never surprised and there will be another one. With these two truths in mind, we must learn the facts and relevant research and dedicate ourselves to biblical truth, prayer and fellowship. Only by doing these things can we be the leaders the Lord has called us to be in our families, churches and communities. To assist in reaching the full spectrum of soul care in this course, we will draw insights from notable teachers and authors, such as Dr. Peter Scazzero, Dr. Wayne Cordeiro and Dr. Robert Douglas. LBC's criminal justice program is committed to equipping its students to persevere through today's challenges so they will be faithful and fully vigilant for tomorrow's opportunities.

Want to learn more about our criminal justice program? Visit lbc.edu/criminal-justice