

Introduction to SoulCare: Getting Started on the Journey



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Let me read you an excerpt from a letter I recently received. “Dear Dr. Crabb, I have a friend in China who has a calling toward counseling, but doesn’t have a way to prepare herself to be a Christian counselor. Is there some type of training using your model that can be made available to her? She has the vision. We need help getting her there.”

Let me tell you the burden that drives me as I teach this course in SoulCare. I believe that most people fight their battles alone. They fight their worst battles alone. I believe that across the world there are millions of people, hundreds of millions, who struggle alone—people who fight personal battles of every description that no one else sees, and they themselves don’t understand. Many of these people are sitting in our churches every Sunday morning. Many are involved in small groups, and no one knows what is happening beneath the surface of their lives. Their interior worlds are a private matter in the middle of Christian fellowship. I believe that in every country on this planet there are thousands of good folks, like the lady in China, who would love to know how to enter people’s lives at a meaningful level, who would love to know how to move into the interior world of someone’s life, who would know how to move into their soul and do some real good and make a difference.

Some people call this kind of help “counseling.” Others call this help “pastoring.” And perhaps others think of this kind of involvement as what a friend provides for another friend. What I want to suggest is what people across the world desperately need, maybe more than anything else, is SoulCare—whether provided by pastors, counselors, or friends. That is why I have entitled this whole course “SoulCare: A Model for Pastors, Counselors, and Friends.”

SoulCare focuses on the inner life. It focuses on the interior world of where true spiritual formation takes place, where we become

Counseling
Pastoring
SOULCARE
Being a Friend

| **SOULCARE** resists:

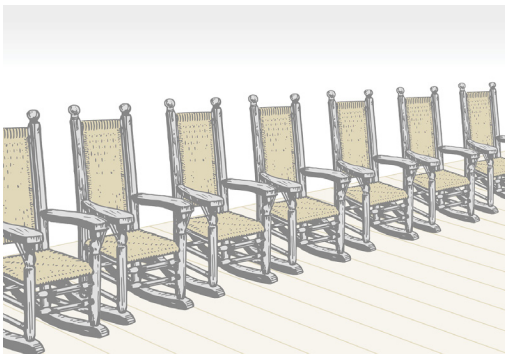
making life work on
the surface

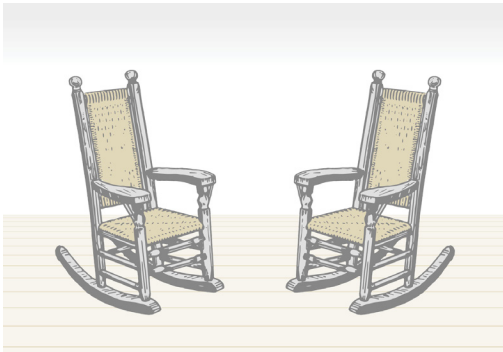
keeping relationships
shallow

who we are intended to be, where we become who we long to be, who we want to be. SoulCare resists the distractions of making life work on the surface, and it resists the temptations to keep relationships shallow—and folks, that’s a huge temptation. You feel it; I feel it in my small group, over lunch with friends. I feel such a temptation to not get involved in somebody else’s soul, but to keep things pleasant, to keep things shallow. SoulCare resists that temptation. SoulCare believes that there’s no more vital work than deep personal renewal. It believes that churches, even successful churches—churches that are full of people every Sunday and the programs are good and everything seems to be going well, the churches where there is no deep personal renewal going on, where people are not meaningfully involved in deep, spiritual work in each other’s lives—that those churches are really houses built on sand and not on rock.

If you and I are going to do the work of SoulCare, if we are going to become effective at moving into each other’s lives, then we are going to have to take a really hard look at how we talk to each other. Take a hard, and sometimes difficult, look at how we relate to one another, what our conversations are like. Most of our conversations are far short of what SoulCare could mean. Let me illustrate.

A long time ago, my wife and I were only married, I suppose five or six years at the time, and we moved to south Florida, to a little city north of Miami Beach by about an hour. We were all excited—a young married couple, living in Florida now, about to have a chance to go see Miami Beach, and finally we had a chance to get a sitter for two young kids, and get in the car and drive the hour, hour and a half, south to the beach—I’ll never forget how excited we were. I’ll also never forget the sight that greeted us and made the most impact when we actually got there. My wife and I were walking down a sidewalk that was in from the ocean by a little bit, and the sidewalk was in the middle of a city that seemed like it was a million miles from the sandy beaches and the blue skies and all the happiness of a resort town. We were in the middle of a noisy, dirty, busy street. And I recall, as Rachel and I walked down the street, we had walked by an apartment house—a big old apartment house that had a deck, a porch, on the front of it that was maybe ten feet deep and perhaps sixty feet long. On this deck, there were maybe one hundred chairs—wicker rocking chairs—as I recall. They were all lined up in perfect rows and perfect columns, nicely, rigidly placed. On these hundred chairs, maybe about sixty of them, were occupied with an older





person. The apartment, we later found out, was a retirement center, and about sixty people were sitting in these rocking chairs. What became immediately apparent as Rachel and I walked past was that nobody was talking, nobody was even rocking in their rocking chair, nobody was drinking iced tea or sipping a cup of coffee, nobody was reading a magazine. Everybody was sitting very rigidly facing forward, not looking to their side, having no conversations of any sort. My wife couldn't take it. She turned to me and whispered. (I am really not sure why she whispered because nobody was listening.) She said, "I feel like breaking into a song and a dance just to wake these people up."

The thought occurred to me, "I wonder what the Spirit of God feels as He walks past our churches. I wonder what He feels as He observes the small groups that we convene in our living rooms. I wonder if He sees us the way my wife and I saw those retired folks in Miami Beach." Certainly there are differences. We talk to each other. Certainly we move a lot, but I wonder if we are a lot more like those folks than we think. Do we really talk in ways that cause a meeting of souls to take place? Is there an intersection of who I am with who somebody else is? Is there a soul-to-soul contact? Or do we really keep our inner worlds to ourselves? Do most of us, in fact, live alone? Do most of us come into our small groups with our interior worlds private and leave with our interior worlds just as private, and nothing has taken place at a deep, meaningful level at all? Maybe the Spirit feels like breaking into a song and a dance to wake us up so that we turn our chairs toward each other and learn to connect at the level of our souls. That is what this course is all about.

This course is all about, what does it mean to turn our chairs toward each other, and we are going to think in this course about why it is difficult to do that. Why is it that when something occurs to me in a small group that I am a part of, I censor it? I am very careful with what I share. What is the fear that keeps us from turning our chairs toward each other? And when you share something in the group that I'm a part of, why do I immediately, internally kind of clench up and feel inadequate and awkward and wish you wouldn't have said that? What does it mean to turn our chairs to each other in a way that our souls really connect? Let me tell you the vision that I have. I want you to imagine for a moment, what would happen, what actually could happen if thousands of people across the world—maybe you who are taking this course—if thousands of people across the world became so safe (I wonder what that means. What does it mean to be a safe

Safe people **join**
others on their journey.

Wise people **guide**
others on their journey.

| Assumption:

There is a certain kind of relating that can deeply touch another person with life-giving power.

person?), if thousands of people across the world become so safe that others would be willing to risk sharing their secret struggles and willing to say things that they might not say to anybody else. What would happen if some of these safe people also became wise enough so that when somebody shared something that was tough that they actually had the wisdom to move into another person's life and to say words that were inspired by the Spirit of God? What would it mean to be able to move into somebody's life with a wisdom that knows how the soul works, how it gets in trouble, why anorexics do not eat, what the effects of sexual abuse are, what does it mean to move into each other's lives in meaningful, deep, soul-connecting, chair-turning kinds of ways?

That is what the course is all about. I want you to know that I offer this training in SoulCare, with a prayer that it might spark a revolution, a revolution based on an understanding that there really is a new way to live. There is a new way to think, and there is a new way to relate that the word "SoulCare" captures.

There is a basic assumption that I make as I begin this course on SoulCare, and let me offer this assumption to you and have you think about it for a bit. The assumption is this: there is a certain kind of relating that can deeply touch another person with life-giving power. There is a certain way to relate, a certain way to connect, a certain way to listen, and to hear and to think and to speak, that if we move in these ways incredibly important and powerful things can happen.

Let me put it a little bit differently. I believe that every human being was intended by God to live in relationships where four things happen: 1) where they are known, deeply known; 2) where they are explored; 3) where they are discovered; and 4) where they are touched. Now, let me tell you what I mean by that. I want to unpack those words for just a moment. You and I were meant to be known. It is frightening, I know, I'm scared of being known, just like you are. But I was intended to be known. I was intended to be a man, just like you were intended to be a man or a woman, to go to our graves with no secrets. We were intended to be known to be fully transparent, not with everybody—that is asking a little bit too much—but to be transparent with at least one other person, maybe a couple, to live our lives with no deep secrets based on shame. You see, when you keep secrets, you keep deep parts of your soul away from the touch of grace. What is the first thing Adam and Eve did when they sinned? They were covered with a sense of shame and they felt like, "If anybody sees

To be **KNOWN**:

to be fully transparent
and live with no
secrets before one or
two people.

me, they are going to reject me. I need to hide, I need to back away, and I need to cover up.” Is it not true that most of us in most of our relationships make it our central agenda to find some way to cover up, to find some way to not be known? And yet, we long to be known.

We also were designed in such a way by our Creator that we long to be explored, to have at least a few people warmly and thoughtfully curious about who we are. Think back to the number of times in your conversations over lunch or in your small group where you made something known that was a bit of a door opener; it was a bit of a tease, if you will. “Here is something that I think somebody might be interested in,” and nobody asked a question. Nobody moved toward you. How did you feel? See, you and I were meant, not only to be known but to be explored, which is the further step in being known. When I say something, I would love to have somebody ask questions and say, “Larry, you are a person of value, what’s happening in you matters to me. Can I explore, can I probe?” I am not looking for somebody to be intrusive and to rip away all of my secrets in one fell swoop, but I am looking for someone to be intrigued and curious about whom I am. So few people follow up what we say with a genuinely interested question. Share something personal and most people stiffen or get away from it quickly by saying, “Well, I’ll offer a word of prayer about that,” or “here’s a piece of advice, here is a Bible verse,” as opposed to, “I’m not sure what you meant by that. I would really love to know.” We are meant to be known. We are meant to be explored.

Thirdly, each one of us longs to be discovered. And this is important. I’ve shared with some people in the past, and I will share it with you now, that there are times that I think of myself, that I have an image of myself, as a bright shiny red apple in the middle of a fruit bowl in the center of a table. And when people look at me they sometimes see the shiny red apple and say, “That looks pretty good.” From a distance, I might not look too bad. I might look like a shiny red apple, and then maybe somebody takes a bite. And the first bite might be sweet. Get to know me a little bit, and I might be a pleasant guy and friendly and interested and involved and might even be helpful. But there is something inside of me that says if you take a second bite or a third bite or maybe a fourth bite, eventually, you are going to bite into the worm that is at the center of my being. Because of the Gospel, I believe theologically the center of my being is not a worm. The center of my being is a magnificent recreation by Christ. And I would love

To be **DISCOVERED**:

to have another person find at the center of my being a magnificent recreation of Christ.

SOULCARE is what happens when one person **knows, explores, discovers, and touches** another person.

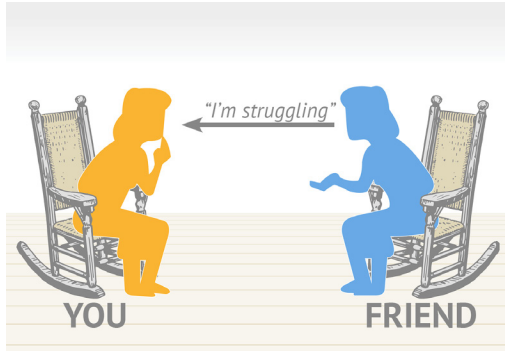
for somebody to believe it is there and to know me and to explore me and discover that core center that is in the absolute middle of every person who is a redeemed Christian. Known, explored, discovered, and then touched.

What is best within us comes alive only when somebody touches us, only when somebody moves toward us with the life that is within them and speaks to us in a way that something springs up within us. You know, you've had so many conversations where people have said things to you and had attempted to be nice to you and kind and give advice or give perspective and you have walked away from the conversation and nothing was different. But you had a couple of conversations where after some words that were very simple, perhaps, that were said to you that something was invigorated. Something came alive. What does it mean to be touched? You and I were made to be known, no secrets, explored with profound curiosity, discovered what God has put in the center somebody actually sees, and touched with a part of me that is most deeply alive actually becomes more alive. I think we can now state a very basic definition, a very beginning definition of SoulCare.

SoulCare is what happens when one person knows, explores, discovers, and touches another person. It does not happen often. It does not happen in every conversation. But when it does happen, life erupts. Or to put it in Jesus' terms, the springs of living water begin to bubble up, they gush up.

And something inside of me knows I am more alive, because somebody has cared for my soul. Somebody has known me; somebody has been safe enough for me to want to be known. Somebody has explored me; somebody has been curious, and I have shared even more. Somebody has discovered the deep work that the Spirit of God has done in my life, and somebody has touched me with their life.

Now I want you to think about what I believe are the two basic requirements of SoulCare. If SoulCare is a certain kind of relationship where people are known, explored, discovered, and touched and if you are taking this course saying to yourself, "I really want to provide that kind of relationship; I want to be someone who cares for other people's souls; I want to know what to do," then I want you to think about what perhaps could be conceptualized as the two basic requirements of SoulCare. Think of it this way. Let us be very, very simple. Let us start with a picture



of you talking to another individual. This other individual shares a burden, and says to you in some way about some particular detail, “I’m struggling.” Think back to the last time that that happened. Think back to the last time that you were having lunch with a friend or perhaps you are a pastor and somebody came into your pastor’s office and made known a struggle. I want you to ask yourself two key questions. When that person shared a struggle with you, what was happening inside of you? Do not start by asking, “Well, what do I say? What do I do? Give me techniques of SoulCare.” Do not start there. Start rather with the question, “What stirred within me? What was I feeling about myself? What was I feeling about myself as somebody who was talking to me about their problems?”

I recall when I first began private practice, a long time ago, when my very first client that came in professionally to see me as their therapist. I remember the whole time feeling so apologetic. I wished he had gotten somebody experienced. How did you get stuck with me? That was happening inside of me. What is happening inside of you when somebody shares with you their struggles? What do you feel about yourself? What are you hoping to accomplish? How do you feel toward your friend? This first question highlights the issue of the passions that stir within the one providing SoulCare. That is Question One.

Question Two: What did you think was going on inside of your friend? As your friend was sharing the struggle, “You know I am really burdened, my wife and I aren’t getting along and I am just kind of mad at her, and things aren’t going well in our marriage and whether its heading toward a divorce I can’t really tell, but things are not really good,” you are thinking first about the passion stirring within you, but then you are asking the second question: What is happening inside of your friend? Now break that down into two categories. The second question of what is happening inside of your friend, break it down into two categories. Category one: What is happening between you and your friend at that moment? Is there something your friend is wanting from you? Is there something your friend is scared of, as he is sharing this with you? Is there something happening in the interpersonal moment between the one who is sharing the struggle and the one who is longing to provide SoulCare in response to the struggle. What are you being pulled, by your friend, to say or do?

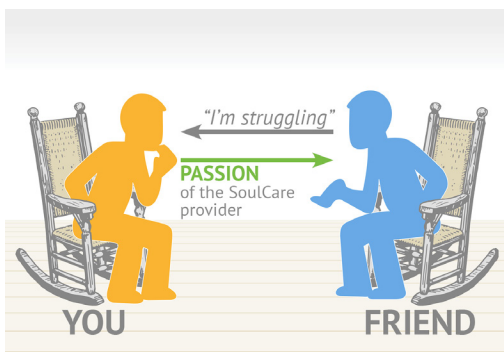
Question 2:

What did you think was going on **inside of your friend** as he/she was sharing the struggle?

We have all been in situations where a friend will share with you something like, “You know things are tough at home with

Category 2:

The second part of wisdom – What is happening beneath your friend's struggle?



my wife.” And you’re a fellow guy talking to this guy. You know that what your friend is wanting you to do is provide support for him. Your friend wants you to take his side. That is the pull your friend is having on you. Are you aware of what is happening in the moment between you and your friend? Call that the first part of wisdom, the wisdom to see what is happening in your friend as he is interacting with you.

But the second part of wisdom is: ask the question, what is happening beneath your friend’s struggle. Why is he so angry? Why is this young woman so depressed? Why is the woman that I have worked with recently, wanting to take her life? What is going on inside of a human being that would make them say, “I really don’t want to live anymore?” Do you know how to think about that sort of thing? You see, that is the second category. The second category is wisdom. First we talk about the passions that exist inside of the person who provides SoulCare, the passions of the one who provides SoulCare. Then we start thinking about the wisdom to know how to move into the other person’s life, the wisdom to understand what is happening inside of another individual.

Let me say all that very, very simply. Passion can be put as simply as this: What is happening in you as you listen to a friend share his struggle—the passions within the one providing SoulCare? And again, understand something very important here that your temptation, just like mine, is going to be to ask the question, “What do I do? How do I help? What do I say? Teach me the techniques of SoulCare. Teach me the techniques of counseling. Teach me how to move into somebody else’s life.” And what I am going to insist on really strongly is that you are not going to become effective at providing SoulCare until you start by asking what is happening inside of you. Do you feel inadequate? Do you feel angry?

There were times in my counseling practice, when I was in professional counseling ministry, where a client would come in and, let me put it bluntly, I didn’t like them. I felt angry; I wish they wouldn’t have come. What do you do with that? I mean it’s a reality; you’ve got to take it into account. I recall the first time, let me say this to my shame, a rather well known Christian called me and said, “Would you see my son? He’s struggling.” Why did I want to help that person more than I wanted to help my previous clients? What is happening inside of me? You have got to start with that. Are we trying to impress, are we trying to, what a lot of people who provide SoulCare do, is try to get through an hour

| WISDOM:

What is happening
inside of the person
who is sharing the
struggle with you?

without looking too stupid? You just want to think about what is happening inside of you, Topic #1. Topic #2, wisdom: What is happening inside of your friend? What is happening inside of the person that is sharing the struggle with you?

If you and I are going to provide effective SoulCare, if we are going to be part of a revolution in the way Christians relate in the body of Christ, if we are going to become part of a revolution where we meaningfully turn our chairs towards one another and actually connect—as opposed to keep our distance and keep things pleasant and keep things shallow and turn our churches into country clubs, where we just have a pleasant time and everything is fine—if we are going to do more than that, then we are going to have to think about what is happening inside of this person’s soul. Do you know how to think about that? Do you know how to enter a soul? That is the topic of wisdom.

We are going to have to be filled with the passion that other people will discern in a way that will make them feel safe. Did you catch that? What are the passions happening inside of me that if they are really driving me as I talk with you, something in you says, “You know, I would like to share who I am with this person. I think I am willing to share my secrets. I would like to be known.”? Nobody ever becomes known without inviting another person to know them. What are the passions inside of me that caused you to invite me to know you, to discover you, to explore you, to touch you? What are the passions?

We’re going to have to be
filled with a **passion** that
will **make others feel safe**.

We will have to be guided by a passion-understanding. And secondly, we will have to talk about what it means, as providers of SoulCare, to have a wisdom that allows us to meaningfully enter souls. You know how you feel—I feel the same way so much of the time—when people share things, I do not know what to say. I say things that come off simplistic and somewhat pat on occasion. What does it mean to have the wisdom that allows one to meaningfully explore the interior world of another? Remember my initial thought. I was very, very burdened by the fact that most people, most people live their entire lives with interior worlds that remain unknown. That is a tragedy.

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What I am hoping to do in this course is to invite you into the messy, exciting, adventurous, meaningful, difficult, sometimes confusing world of SoulCare. I want you to study with me a passion/wisdom model of SoulCare that I believe can prove useful to you, whether you are a professional therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, social

A Passion/Wisdom
Model of
SOULCARE

worker, marriage counselor, whether you're a pastor, somebody who is involved in people's lives, hopefully more than just behind the pulpit. (And by the way, I know a fair number of pastors who are scared to come out from behind their pulpit, because that is where they are in control.) What does it mean to come out from behind your pulpit and talk to people meaningfully? Do we have the wisdom and the passion to be effective in our role as pastors, as counselors, or maybe just as friends, people who deeply desire to enter other people's lives with a power to do real good?

In our next class, we are going to start looking beneath the surface at the passions that stir within us as we seek to do the effective work of SoulCare. We are going to consider what it means to turn our chairs toward one another.