

## A Personal Search: Beginning with an Inside Look



*Larry J. Crabb, Ph.D.*

*Experience: Founder and Director of NewWay Ministries in Silverthorne, Colorado*

### IDEA 1

SoulCare is not a technique you learn;  
it is a **relationship** you offer.

So far in our thinking about SoulCare, we have introduced two fundamental ideas. Idea 1: SoulCare is not a technique that you learn; it is a relationship you offer. When I was in graduate school learning to be a psychologist, that thought never occurred to me. I wanted my courses and my supervisors to teach me what to do. I wanted to become competent. When you understand SoulCare, not as a technique to master but a relationship to offer, then the issue does not become competence quite so centrally. The question is not, “Am I a competent person?” so much as the question becomes, “Am I a safe person? Am I a safe person in a relationship so that you will invite me to know you, to explore you, to discover you, and touch you? The issue has less to do with competence and more to do with a kind of person that I am. Am I safe?” And that raises a whole host of questions. What makes people safe?

Now in some obvious ways, we can answer that. I can recall being in a group of guys where one fellow was making fun and telling jokes about a particular sexual perversion. And I recall wincing, sitting there thinking if somebody in this group of guys is struggling with that, he is going to take that reality and hide it more deeply than ever before. Months later, one of the other fellows in that particular group did talk to me and let me know that he was struggling with that perversion. And what he said was, “I would never tell ...” (and he listed the name of the fellow who made known that concern). What does it mean to be a safe person? That is a very, very huge and important question.

So the first major idea we are developing so far is: SoulCare is not a technique that you learn, a procedure that you master. It is rather a relationship that you offer. A relationship, which makes it possible for someone to be known, explored, discovered, and touched. That is Idea 1.

Idea 2: SoulCare is not primarily about fixing problems. Now, if

## IDEA 2

**SoulCare** is not about fixing problems so that someone's **life** becomes more **comfortable**. It is about **pursuing** a vision so that someone's **character** becomes **better**.

**SoulCare** is all about nourishing an **appetite for God** that reduces every other pleasure, **whether legitimate**, neurotic, or sinful, to a lesser pleasure and **therefore resistible**.

**One**, **SoulCare** is not a technique practiced by a skilled expert, it is a **relationship offered by a safe person**.

you hear that, it will take the pressure off. It will add a different kind of a dimension, but it will take off the immediate pressure. SoulCare is not about fixing problems, of getting the couple to relate more intimately, of getting the dad to deal with his son so he straightens out and gets off drugs. SoulCare is not about fixing problems. And that is really important, because I know what I felt as a counselor or psychologist for all these years, so many times people would come, wanting me to fix their problems, asking me, "Well, how do I parent my child? How do I love my husband? How do I love my wife?" thinking that I know. Do you understand that people with all this fancy training so often really don't know? We do not know how to fix a lot of problems. But, maybe there is a way to move differently into people's lives. Maybe the issue is not, "I've got to become a renowned expert who knows how to fix problems"; maybe the issue is something very different in SoulCare. SoulCare is about pursuing a compelling vision. That is what I talked about in Lesson Two.

SoulCare is about pursuing a compelling vision so that when I am involved with you, the effect of our time together has less to do with solving problems and more to do with nourishing an appetite for God that is in the core of your soul because you are a Christian, and guiding you in a spiritual journey with wisdom, so that you actually develop a consuming experience of the reality of God that becomes stronger than all other pleasures. Therefore, all other desires become lesser; they become second place, but still wanted, still desired—good things, like godly kids that do not do drugs. Of course you want that, but now that becomes secondary; and the primary appetite of your soul, and the primary experience of your soul, has everything to do with God. You see, what I am really saying here is that SoulCare is all about a new way to live that the Gospel makes possible. SoulCare is all about helping people to live a new way that the Gospel makes possible when we live in a way that is all about God and not all about us.

So now we have two beginning ideas in our minds, two foundational thoughts, as we are beginning to develop this understanding of SoulCare. First, to repeat it, SoulCare is not a technique practiced by skilled experts; it is a relationship offered by a safe person. Secondly, SoulCare is not about fixing problems in order to make life more comfortable. It is about entering someone's interior world with the power to stir someone's appetite for God. And as that happens, the person begins operating from a different center; not for success or impressing other people, but they are operating from the center of wanting the deepest core of their

**| Question 1:****What makes a person safe?**

being to know God and to glorify Him.

So those two ideas: 1) not a technique, it is a relationship; 2) it is all about a compelling vision to know God, not to fix problems. Those two fundamental ideas in forming our direction as we think about SoulCare leads to two very obvious questions that if you thought about two ideas, you must ask. The first question is this, what makes a person safe? Or to personalize it, are you a safe person?

If I knew you, if I knew you in a small group of mine, if I knew you from a lunch conversation, if you were in my Sunday school class, if you were a buddy of mine, a neighbor of mine, would you be someone that I would say, "That person is safe. I think I could say anything to him. I could say anything to her without fear of being scorned or judged or dismissed or rejected or backed-away from"? What makes a person safe? Huge question, if we are going to understand SoulCare.

Second question that grows out of my two fundamental ideas is this—what makes a person powerful? People who provide SoulCare effectively, meaningfully, are both safe people that invite others into a relationship where they are known, explored, discovered and touched. And people who provide SoulCare are powerful people who have the wisdom to move into other people's lives and to see the appetite for God stimulated. So we are going to ask these two questions: 1) what makes a person safe? and 2) what makes a person powerful?

Now, to answer these two questions well, we are going to have to take a journey. It is a journey that is difficult to take, and it is a journey that in our culture not many want to take. But it is a vital journey. It is a journey into our own interior worlds. You cannot become an effective provider of SoulCare by simply studying (as a clinician) what is happening in the other person, and what their psychopathology is, or what their internal emotional battles are, and what the proper procedures are to help them become different.

The first thing that must be done on the journey towards SoulCare is to realize the journey takes us first into our own interior worlds. What is happening inside of me? What is happening inside of me in terms of my motives? What are my energies as I talk with you? Even as I talk to you now in this course, what am I trying to do? What is my interior world like even at this very moment? Am I

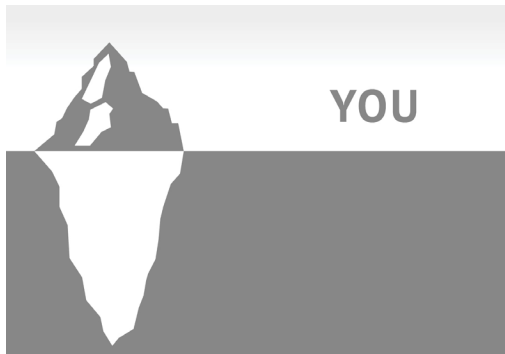
**| Question 2:****What makes a person powerful?**

trying to speak well, so that you will be impressed with me as a teacher? Am I trying to be clear so that you will tell your friends, this man makes things clear? Or is there something in me that has an appetite for God that is ruling within the deepest part of my soul as I share it with you? Now, that is a very challenging question, because I know that my interior world is a bit of a mess. I know that all sorts of strange, unworthy, difficult things are happening in me that just are not good at all.

Why was it the case that when one particular person came to see me that I very much felt a pressure to help that person and do a better job with that person versus this other person. Do I succumb to the gold ring philosophy that James talks about? Am I more interested in taking prominent people or wealthy people and making an impact on them, instead of an ordinary person who has no money and no status and stature? What are the motivations happening inside of my interior world? Difficult questions. Why is it that when a counselee said to me some time ago, “I don’t really think this is helpful, and I think that I may be going to see ... (and she mentioned another counselor),” why inside of me did I immediately shut down and feel angry? What is happening inside of me? What is going on inside of my soul?

There is a good man who was sitting recently in my office with his wife, and I noticed that whenever his wife talks, he gets quiet. When I probed a little bit and said that I noticed that when your wife goes on for awhile, you tend to kind of hush up a little bit, you tend to retreat, you back away. I would just like to observe that. And he said, “Well, you know, I guess she annoys me a little bit.” And when he said that, his wife bursts into tears and tells me that she feels hated by this guy. I can recall at that point in our SoulCare hour that I just felt a deep sense of inadequacy. I do not know what to do. What is happening inside of me?—an important question.

Before you and I are going to be able to move in a relationship where SoulCare happens, before you are going to be able to talk to that friend whose name you circled a little while ago, somebody who shared a problem with you, and you want to move into their life and offer them SoulCare, before you can do that, before you can even think about doing that, you must begin with an inside look into your own interior world. I want us to start that in this particular lesson; I want us to start the idea of an inside look.



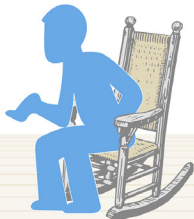
And to do that, let me employ the very familiar image of an iceberg, an image that you all know about that can be very easily sketched. Here is a picture of you. You all know what an iceberg is. You all know that an iceberg is a mass of ice, a little bit of which is visible above the water, but most of it is invisible beneath the waterline. So let us use that simple metaphor to describe me, to describe you, and to suggest in each of our lives that we all have an exterior world. We all have a world that we are quite willing to make visible to others. We all have a world that we are happy to share with others when somebody at a party says, “Hi, what’s your name?” we are willing to share. “My name is Larry Crabb,” we are willing to share. “My name is Sue Smith. What do you do?” We are willing to share certain things. “Are you married?” We are willing to share certain things. “Do you have kids?” It is all part of our exterior world. But are you aware that there are certain things that are hidden from other people, and you work hard to see to it that they stay hidden, just like I do. Call that your interior world. Beneath the waterline, there really is an interior world. There is a world beneath the surface that I want to hide from myself, and I certainly want to hide from you. I do not want to face certain things inside of me. I want to make sure certain things that are unpleasant about who I am—that I do not pay much attention to them—and that certainly you will not know about them. Most of us live in hiding. Most of us have things that are true about us that we want nobody else to see. Call that our interior world.

Now, would you agree with me that most conversations, most conversations even in good small groups, most conversations over lunch with good friends, most conversations have more to do with sharing our exterior worlds than with ever really getting meaningfully into the depths of our souls?

We simply do not do that. We are a culture that has learned to make it without becoming deep. We are a superficial, shallow culture to a very significant degree. I think it was James Packer, who, when he arrived from England to America, observed us as he looked at our country that, “American Christianity,” he once said, “is a thousand miles wide and one inch deep.”

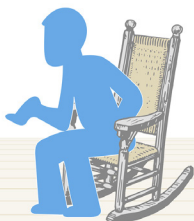
What he is saying is that most of the conversations are no different than the kind of conversations that we have with a waiter in a restaurant. The waiter walks up and says, “Can I help you, what would you like to drink?” And we say, “I would like a glass of water with a twist of lemon.” Are we sharing much? The answer is no. And the waiter says, “Fine, I will get it for you.” And we

*"I'm losing confidence in myself... I am wondering if I'm on the shelf, or losing my effectiveness."*



Frank

*"Megan just told Ann and I that she hates church. She doesn't want to go anymore. Things aren't going so good right now."*



Frank

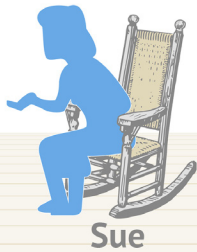
say, "Thank you." Is it possible that a lot of our conversations in the Christian community really have no more depth, at least not significantly, not substantially, than the conversation that we had the other day with the waiter?

I would like to drive this point home a little bit. I do not think we are going to get far in thinking about SoulCare without coming to a pretty strong conviction, a pretty strong agreement, that our conversations, even when they seem vulnerable and open, really are not—that our conversations really are more above the waterline than they are below the waterline.

Reflect on a conversation that took place in a small group recently, and see if you agree with me that this conversation really is not very different than the conversation between the waiter and the diner, who asked for a glass of water with a twist of lemon. In this one particular small group, a man named Frank, who was an associate pastor, decided he wanted to become vulnerable and what he said to his small group one evening was this. He said, "I'm losing confidence in myself. I have been in my church now for a number of years, and I used to be asked to preach on a fairly regular basis by our senior pastor. But in the last six months, I have not been asked at all to occupy the Sunday morning pulpit and I am not sure why. Maybe I haven't done a very good job." He was in touch with some of his insecurity, and he was sharing that with his group. He also added, "There are fewer people in my church who are calling for me and asking to talk with me. I guess I am wondering if I'm on the shelf, or losing my effectiveness. I don't know." He shared this, and I suppose if we are in a small group we are thinking, "Man, that's rich. That's heavy. That's deep. You are really getting into it. That goes way beyond, 'I'd like a glass of water with a twist of lemon.'" And then he adds something that even seems perhaps more personal and difficult and vulnerable; he says, "You know, to top it all off, my oldest daughter, Megan, just told Ann and I, my wife and myself, that she really hates church. She doesn't want to go any more. Things aren't going so good right now." And he makes it known to a small group.

Now clearly this is fairly vulnerable communication. I would not want to deny for a moment that this is meaningful conversation to Frank. He is making known something very, very real. But what would it mean to provide SoulCare for this gentleman, who has shared these struggles? What would it mean to become the kind of person who is safe enough, where Frank would say, "I'm willing to

*"I know Megan really well... Megan is just such a wonderful girl... it's just a phase she's going through...you don't need to worry."*



Sue

*Encouragement that is premature stops movement toward an inside look and therefore never invigorates the soul with the energy of God.*



Sue

let you know all that is going on inside of me. I'm willing to have you explore what's happening inside of me in the middle of this crisis of sorts. I'm willing to have you look so deeply to discover that maybe there is something within me that's alive that this discouragement cannot kill. And I would love to have you touch the deepest part of my soul, so I leave tonight encouraged with an appetite to know God and to glorify him that is stronger than my appetite to be a well received preacher, and even stronger than my appetite to have a daughter who loves God and loves church and thinks I'm the best dad and best pastor she's ever seen. I'd love to have an appetite stronger than that."

What would it mean to have those kinds of conversations? Well, let me tell you what actually happened in that group. A woman named Sue in the group responded by saying this; she said, "Oh Frank, I know Megan really well. I have been involved with Megan in the youth group for actually a number of years. I taught her in Sunday school class for a long time. Oh Frank, Megan is just such a wonderful girl, she really is. I think it's just a phase she is going through. Most teens go through it. Frank, she'll be fine, you don't need to worry."

Have you ever received that kind of encouragement? What did Sue just do? Did Sue not essentially dismiss, maybe trivialize, the significance of Frank's concerns? Notice the obvious; Sue did not ask one question. She did not turn to Frank and say, "I'm so intrigued by what you are saying. I'd love to know more." She came up with an answer. Sue tried to fix the problem. She showed no interest in knowing Frank, no interest in exploring Frank, no interest in discovering Frank. All she wanted to do was touch Frank. But until you do the first three, touching is very superficial.

There is a principle that grows out of this, and you might want to note this. It is a very important principle that most of us violate much of the time. Encouragement that is premature—which I define as encouragement that precedes hearing someone, encouragement that precedes knowing and exploring and discovering someone—stops movement toward an inside look and therefore never invigorates the soul with the energy of God. I believe Sue, with all of her good intentions, failed in providing SoulCare for Frank.

Robert, another gentleman in the small group, took up the refrain from Sue and he said, "Frank, you mentioned that you are concerned about your inadequate preaching. Or whether perhaps



Robert

*"About a year ago,  
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communication, and it  
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of help."*

you are inadequate because you haven't been asked to preach for a while. You know I'm in sales. You know that. And I think it was about a year ago, I took a course in communication, and it was really helpful. I think it made me a much more effective presenter of my sales material in marketing settings, and I think it might be of help to you. Actually, there were several preachers in the course. I would love to get you the literature on the course. I think it might really be of help."

Now, you are Frank, what are you feeling? Sue told you Megan's doing fine, it's just a phase. Robert tells you that a course might help you preach better. What are they trying to do? Is there not some element in which these good people with, in very significant ways, good hearts that care about Frank are trying to fix Frank? Notice again, Robert did not ask a single question.

Folks, if there is one thing that I would like to get across at this point, we are a culture that is so bad at asking questions. Very rarely does anybody follow up something we say with a question—not an interrogation, not a ruthless probing, but a profound interest in just who we are, wanting to join us. People want to fix. Sue did it. Robert did it. And notice a principle, Robert actually gave advice here—talking about Robert speaking to Frank—and he said, "I think you ought to take this course in communication." Now here is a principle I want you to see from Robert's response, advice—that is what Robert offered—advice offered by someone who has not first shown curiosity about somebody else's world rarely has the power to reach someone's soul deeply.

A third person in the group, a woman named Marie, she said, "I feel compelled to pray for Frank and Ann." Ann was sitting in the room as well, Frank's wife. She was visibly hurting over Megan and her husband's insecurities. Frank was sharing his difficult things. Sue reassured them about Megan. Robert made available to them a course that might be helpful. And Marie comes along and says, "You know, I think the course might be helpful, and I think Megan's a fine girl too, but I just feel compelled right now to pray. Could we all just gather around Frank and Ann and lay our hands on their shoulders and commit them to the Lord? Can we gather around and pray for them right now?" Am I actually going to say that is a bad thing to do, bad to pray?

I have been in a number of groups where people have gathered around me, and put their hands on my shoulder and prayed for me. I want to tell you, I found it very, very meaningful. But it had



Robert

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Marie

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been meaningful to the degree that the people had gone to the trouble to know me, to explore me, to discover me. Then their prayers touched me. Notice in my little illustration here, again Marie asked no questions. She assumes that she knows what is happening inside of Frank and Ann, because maybe she has faced similar trials and nothing was said to know, to explore, to discover.

Principle: Support, whether through good things like prayer and affirmation, can become a cheap and easy substitute for turning your chair toward someone. As I look at this illustration, neither Sue nor Robert nor Marie turned their chairs toward Frank in the way that I envision. I would love to see that different. I would love to see groups where people turn their chairs.

What is it going to take? It takes courage to relate more deeply. It takes a willingness to let somebody explore my interior world. It takes a recognition that SoulCare happens beneath the waterline, when the SoulCarer is speaking from his or her depths to the depths of the other person. Where I see Sue and Robert and Marie as speaking from above their waterlines to the exterior worlds of Frank and Ann, SoulCare, in a meaningful deep level, did not happen. I believe that community is perhaps the most underutilized resource in the Christian world today. It could be so different.

How come we do not look beneath the waterline? How come we do not look in our own souls and talk to each other out of our internal realities? Why do we stay at the level of giving advice and offering courses that might be helpful to Frank, and reassuring that Megan's doing fine and offering a prayer that does not allow us or require us to get involved deeply with Frank? Why do we do that? What is going on inside of us? Are we willing to face that?

You know as I have taken this journey, and I am still just a beginner, but as I have taken the journey into SoulCare, I think the most frightening thing is to face myself, to really face what is in me. Because when I really face what is in me, when I really face what is in me is I relate to my wife and my children. When I really face what is within me, I relate to my counselees and my friends, I realize that what matters most to me I cannot control. Just like you, I want to be in control. I do not want to face my mysterious depths where I do not understand what is going on. But, you are hearing my encouragement. You are hearing that I am saying that if we are going to become effective providers of SoulCare, we are going to have to look deep beneath into our own interior worlds to



Marie

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The most **frightening** aspect  
of **SoulCare** is **facing**  
**ourselves.**

### 1. God says an inward look is important.

*"The purposes of a man's heart are [hidden beneath] deep waters, but a man of understanding [someone who knows what it takes to really live] draws them out."*

— Proverbs 20:5

### 2. God looks inside us.

*"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance [the displayed self] but the Lord looks at the heart [the hidden self]."*

— 1 Samuel 16:7

see why we do not explore and do not ask questions and give quick advice and quick encouragement and offer a quick prayer. What is going on inside of us? Is it important to get to know ourselves at this level? Well, there are a fair number of people who say, "no." But I want to suggest to you that it is very important to know our interior worlds for one, I think, rather definitive reason: because God says it is.

And let me close this lesson by giving you just a couple of things that God says, that in my mind make it clear that we have got to look into our lives. It is important to look into our lives. Well, #1, because very simply, God says we ought to look into our lives. In Proverbs 20:5, God, through the writer, says this, "The purposes of a man's heart are like deep waters." What is really happening inside of our soul is hidden beneath the water. There is the iceberg metaphor. But the Proverb goes on to say that, "... a man of understanding draws them out."

Secondly, God looks inside of us. God not only tells us that we should look inside of ourselves, but God Himself is one who looks deeply inside of us. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 16:7 that the Lord does not look at the things man looks at. "Man looks at the outward appearance," the exterior world, the displayed self. "But the Lord looks at the heart," the interior world, the hidden self.

Thirdly, God sees what we cannot see. And He wants to show it to us. "The heart is deceitful above all things," Jeremiah tells us (chapter 17 and verse 9). Who can know the interior world? And God says, "Well I do. I would like to reveal it to you. I have written a book that penetrates to the deepest parts of the soul."

I want to suggest fourthly, and very briefly, that both real change, in ourselves and in people for whom we provide SoulCare, depend on what goes on in our own interior worlds. Jesus told the Pharisees, a group of people who were specialists in looking good on the outside and hiding all that was going on inside, He said to them, "If you are going to really change, you have got to change from the inside out." Clean up what is inside before the outside will become clean.

If you and I are going to provide effective SoulCare, we are going to have to clearly see what is happening in our soul before we can clearly see what is happening in another. And that is the last reason I want to give you for why an inside look is important. The book of Matthew tells us, in chapter 7, we are not going to see

**5. We cannot clearly see what's happening in another's soul until we first see what's happening in ours.**

*"...first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

— Matthew 7:5

clearly into the problem in somebody else's life, until we first see clearly into the difficulties in our own interior worlds. An inside look is crucial. That is the point of this lesson. The next lesson will actually begin to see what is in us that an inside look reveals.