

## Entering the Battle for Another's Soul: The First Step



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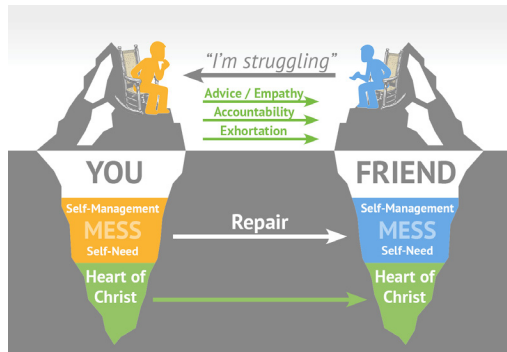
It is time to enter the battle for someone's soul, to engage with someone in a way that arouses their appetite for Christ to the point where all other appetites become secondary—no longer demands but merely desires. We have talked, so far, about what it means to develop the passions that are required in order to meaningfully enter somebody else's interior world. And now we want to shift gears a bit and talk about the wisdom that is required so that when we enter somebody else's soul we have some idea of what to expect, and how to move around, and how to talk about the things that we discover. What does it mean to develop the wisdom to move into somebody else's interior world so we can enter the battle for their soul?

Now make no mistake about it—it is a battle. There are dark forces in each of our souls. We talked in our last lesson about the fact that in me and in you, and in everybody with whom we speak, there is this dynamic force called self-need. I matter, nobody matters more. God does not matter as much as I do. My well-being is the point. Self-need and self-management: “I will be in control. I will handle this embarrassing situation. I will maneuver my kids, whether it is buying overhead projectors for family devotions. I will do whatever is required to see to it that I manage my world so my needs are met.” That is in me as a SoulCarer, and that is in the person that's receiving SoulCare from me. That is in each of us.

We want to understand what it means to move into somebody's interior world and to pour out the life of Christ wisely, through verbal expression, to pour out the life of Christ that is within us in a way that actually invigorates the life of Christ that is in somebody else. A good friend of mine has often put it this way. He said, “You know you are in a good conversation, you know you are in a SoulCaring conversation, if when the conversation is over something in you is more inflamed, more alive toward God than it was before the conversation.” You know, and I know, we have been in lots of conversations where after the conversation, I want

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**Self-Management:** I will be in control. **I will** manage **my world** so **my needs** are met.



to worship less than before the conversation. Now I must take responsibility for what I am to do with that, but the effect of a person who is providing SoulCare is to invigorate the appetite for God.

Now let me sketch that very simply, so you get a visual picture of what I am talking about. Now we are going to introduce two people, both by the metaphor of the iceberg, and we are going to suggest that each person has an exterior world. And the person that is coming to you for SoulCare is somebody who has made known a concern, somebody who has said, “my marriage is struggling,” or “I’m kind of discouraged,” or “I feel tired all the time ... on a thin edge ... crying a lot.” Whatever the problem is, they have made known their concern. Now if all we provide is something like advice or empathy or perhaps accountability or exhortation, I am going to suggest that it is one person’s exterior world talking to another person’s exterior world. That is not SoulCare. The person makes known their mess. They give you some understanding of what is happening inside of them, their background, the difficulties with their parents, the insecurities that they feel, and all the struggles that are inside, but you have a mess as well. In your interior world, you have the mess of self-need and self-management; and they have the mess of self-need and self-management. Suppose that out of your self-need and your self-management you come on as an expert therapist who is attempting to somehow repair the mess in the other. I would suggest that is not SoulCare. So what is SoulCare? SoulCare is a recognition that in the core of my being, the heart of Christ has actually been implanted within me. The Bible puts it this way: that when I was converted, I was given a new heart—not the old mess of self-need and self-management, but a new heart that has an appetite for God, a new heart that can experience God in the way that is stronger, and brings me stronger pleasure, than any other experience. Is it possible that I could speak out of that new heart into the new heart that is in the other person who is a believer? If the person is not a believer, the new heart is not there. But if the person is a believer, the life of Christ is literally in them, as the life of Christ is literally in me. Now when I start speaking out of the life of Christ in me, and touch the life of Christ in somebody else, that is when SoulCare takes place.

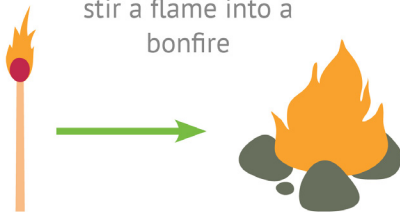
How do we enter the battle for somebody’s soul? How do we come to the point of being able to speak out of our life into somebody else’s life in a way which stirs it up? Recall that wonderful passage in Hebrews 10:24, where the writer to the Hebrews says that “when

*"Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds."*

— *Hebrews 10:24 (RSV)*

**Stimulate (Paroxysm):**

stir a flame into a bonfire



## Curiosity and Vision

we get to together,” and in verse 25 he says, “and make sure you don’t stop getting together. Make sure you get together. But when you do, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. I want you to consider (and the word for consider is very strong in the original language—it means pay continual close attention) how you walk into church on Sunday morning, when you have coffee with someone between church and Sunday school, when you walk into a living room for a small group, when you meet your friend for a meal, think very hard ongoingly of what you can do to move into their life.” That is what the verse is saying. Consider how to stimulate. And the word for “stimulate” is a very powerful word. It comes from the word *paroxysm*. It means, “how can I move into your life in a way which takes the flame that the Spirit of God has put within you, and how can I stir that flame into a bonfire?” So because of our conversation, you are more in love with God than you were before the conversation. Because of our conversation, you are more dependent on God when your son walks in the door at 4:00 in the morning drunk, and you are so burdened about it. You are more in love with God in the middle of your wife leaving you. And because you are more in love with God, something in you is solid, and you are able to honor Him and to deal with the problems in your life with great wisdom. What does it mean to be able to do that? Consider, hard, how to stir up people who know Jesus to love and good deeds. How do we stir up the love of Christ within us? That is what SoulCare is all about.

I want to talk with you in this lesson particularly about what I regard as the very most important first step in entering the battle. And I want to suggest that the first step in entering the battle can be summarized by two words: curiosity and vision. Again I want you to get very practical, as much as you can. Think about that person that you have talked to recently, somebody who shared a burden with you—a friend, a spouse, a child— somebody who has made known to you a concern. You have been exploring now yourself a little bit, your own passions, and your own self-centeredness—and you are glad we are off that topic finally—and you realize that there really is something alive in you and you would love to pour it into your friend who is struggling. Before you do anything else, I suggest that you ponder the fact that in the core of your being, you are very curious, and you are very hopeful of a vision that could be reached. That is in you by the grace of God’s Spirit if you are a believer. Let us talk about these two words: curiosity and vision that bring hope.

## | Curiosity and Vision

"You've **never met** an  
**ordinary** mortal."  
— C.S. Lewis

First, curiosity. Remember what C.S. Lewis said. One of his lines that is so well known by most fans of Lewis is this: "You've never met an ordinary mortal." You've never met somebody who is just, eh, another person. "Yeah, she is the one who checks out my groceries at the grocery store, and she was a little bit slow and was talking too much—and I got mad— but I got my groceries and got home in time. I just met, yeah, some woman that checked out groceries. Yeah, the woman that cut my hair the other day, she is a nice lady." No, you know, you have never met an ordinary mortal. Every person that you meet, every person with whom you rub shoulders, and Lewis talked about this, every person that you have ever seen, every person that you speak with, every person that comes into the range of your vision is somebody who is a person of inestimable dignity and depravity—they are people who bear God's image, and they are people who are fallen.

What that means, very simply, is this: everybody you are in contact with is somebody who has fallen short of God's design. Everybody you are in contact with is somebody who is not living to their full potential. Everybody you are in contact with is somebody who is not living by design and therefore is not experiencing the fullness of joy, which is available to them. Everybody you are in contact with is somebody who is not bringing God as much glory as He deserves to get out of their lives. That is who you have been chatting with in your small group every week for the last couple of years.

It seems to me it is like, a little bit like, driving along the highway with hundreds of cars, including your own, and you notice with every car on the road, something's wrong. An engine is sputtering, the brakes are not working, the front tires are out of alignment, the car is veering—it will not stay straight. Every car is moving in a way that is not entirely right. Something is wrong. Something is flawed. Every person, created by God to resemble Jesus Christ, and thus to have a desire for the Father, is moving in a way that reflects that their internal workings are not right. There is no car on the road that is moving properly. There is no car on the road that is moving in the right direction entirely. Now when you see somebody, you need to understand that at any given moment, the movement that you see in their life—if the Spirit is ruling in their lives—they are moving toward an eternal destiny that is wonderful, toward a beauty that is magnificent. Or at this moment, the way they treat their husbands, and the way they are handling their own sexual desires, they are moving in a direction that is destined to bring them to incredible misery. You have never met

### | Curiosity and Vision

When we see the mess, we often  
become frustrated,

or we pretend things are better than  
they really are.

### | Curiosity and Vision

*"They dress the wound of my  
people as though it were not  
serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say,  
when there is no peace."*

— **Jeremiah 6:14**

an ordinary mortal.

But I would suggest when you begin to become aware that everybody is kind of a mess, when you become aware of that, your response can be a variety of responses. One response might be that you might get very frustrated. "You know, nothing's working as it should. There is no small group that works properly; there is no church that works properly; there is no marriage that works properly. I'm sick of the whole thing!" You become a cynic; and you become despairing; and you become tough to live with. And when you get frustrated over the fact that nobody is living as they should, including yourself—which people with frustration do not see quite as clearly—what you end up doing is you keep your chairs facing straight forward. There is no turning because you do not want to get involved with people that frustrate you. You are not a good mechanic; you are tired of cars that do not work, so you just stay away from them. Frustration. Or, what a lot of people do is, and I think that this is the disease of the Western church to some degree, we pretend. We do not get frustrated. We pretend that things are better than they are.

One of the most challenging verses in Scripture to me is Jeremiah 6, where God looks down on the religious leaders of that day, those who were charged with the responsibility for SoulCare, and what He says to them is: "You have healed the wound of my people superficially." You have dealt with the wound, you have dealt with the mess, you have dealt with the struggle, the self-centeredness, you have dealt with the malfunction of the engine, without recognizing the seriousness of the disease. You have dealt with the wound as though it were not serious. And what you have said is "peace," when there really is no peace. You have been in your small group with friends, and they seem to be doing fine; and you never think more deeply about what is really going on in their souls that needs the care that maybe you can, by the grace of God, give them. You pretend. You deny. It is a disease that afflicts all of us, because frankly it is a lot easier to live in denial than it is to live in honesty. Start living in honesty, and you will realize that at the last party you went to, where everybody was well dressed and friendly and sociable, that all was not as it seemed. Now I am not suggesting that at that party you should walk around saying, "You need SoulCare; I am here to give it to you." I am hardly suggesting that. But I am suggesting that you stay aware of the fact that the person who is the wonderful hostess, and is handling herself really well, that there is something inside of her soul that desperately needs care. And maybe, over the course of the next



### | Curiosity and Vision

When we see **the mess**, we can become **curious** to discover the **eternally important** things happening **inside people**.

several years, you might have opportunity to give it. Do you think like that?

Or, do you just get frustrated, or do you live in denial? Or, maybe a third option—are you curious? I wonder what is happening in this wonderful hostess. I wonder what is happening in this business guy that is making tons of money. I wonder what is really happening in this guy that just went bankrupt. I wonder what is happening in this guy that cannot find a job. I wonder what is happening in this woman who is anorexic, and this fellow who is involved in sexual immorality. Can we, rather than getting frustrated— you should not be there—or denial—“well, it is not as bad as it looks”—can we learn what it means to be curious? Internally important things are going on inside each of us. I want to share personally for just a moment. There are so many things in my life that are going on and when somebody is curious about them, respectfully—not intrusively, but curious about them—I find an invigoration. I find a sense of “you mean you are interested? You mean you really care?”

I have mentioned a time or two that a few years back, I was operated on for cancer, and it was a life-threatening situation. Cancer is always a serious disease, of course, and I came within six hours of death several times. What a very profound experience for me. And I live in a community of men and women, brothers and sisters, that have been wonderful to me. I have a wife that was as faithful as any wife could ever be in a situation of those tragic proportions. And I am so grateful for so much, but there is one thing that I still think about some. I would have loved to have had an evening where a couple of friends gathered around and said, “Larry, we are really curious about what your walk with the Lord was like in the middle of your cancer. Would you talk to us about that? We have got a couple of hours; we would love to hear.”

What does it mean to be curious about another human being? If we see the big picture, if we see the eternal perspective, the divine design, then we will, at the very least, be curious. We are going to be intrigued by the woman whose competence is real, but whose tenderness is absent. We are not going to be judgmental initially; we are going to say, “she bears the image.” How is her fallenness contributing? Here is a woman who is very competent, who has no idea how to be tender. What is going on with her? I don’t get it. We are going to be curious about the man who makes lots of money, and just seems to be content with surface relationships. He is content with surface relationships—how can that be? He was

### | Curiosity and Vision

If we see **God's bigger picture**, we will be intrigued by what is **going on in others**.

### | Curiosity and Vision

The human drama is  
**Fascinating:**

We should **be attentive** to the human drama the way **a child** is attentive to a **spider weaving** its **web**.

### | Curiosity and Vision

The human drama is  
**Mysterious:**

There is a lot that we **are never** going to explain in **SoulCare**, yet we **want to** explain so that we can **control**.

designed for deep relationships with people, and he is content to have only country club relationships. I do not get it. Be curious. It is rare.

The question that we need to be asking as we begin to move into people's lives—not with a mood of judgmentalism, not with a mood of analysis—is with a mood of, “I really would love to know what is going on. I don't understand. I am not looking to figure it all out, but I would love to know, explore, discover, and then maybe touch this person for the glory of God.” Curiosity, for at least two reasons. One, the human drama is fascinating. The human drama, the drama of human existence, is a fascinating thing. We are going to be attentive to the human drama. We should be attentive to the human drama the way a child is attentive to a spider weaving its web. Look at that. Is not that fascinating? Look at how people operate. Yeah, it might be difficult, and it might be painful, and it might be ugly, and it might be horrendous, but how could the Holocaust happen? Yes, be appalled by it, but be curious. Be intrigued. How can this woman give her body to make money? How does that happen? How can a young girl, a two-year-old baby girl grow up in a home where she ends up making money through prostitution? How does this happen? Be very curious. Yes, appalled, burdened, concerned, but curious. The human drama is fascinating.

Secondly, the human drama is mysterious. There is a lot here that we are never going to explain. And the passion to explain is one of the evil passions within our soul, because we want to explain so that we can control. If we are going to get involved in SoulCare, we are going to get out of our depth very quickly. If we are going to get involved in SoulCare, if we are going to be curious about people's lives, then we need to understand that we were created to enjoy a God, but we seek pleasure elsewhere. It is insanity. It makes no sense. It is a mystery that God has worked in our lives, and loved us, and saved us, and redeemed us—why did He do all that? We really do not get it. How does it all work? We do not understand. But how good to look at it with incredible intrigue. Curiosity. The spirit of curiosity begins the process of SoulCare.

The second word that I want you to think about is the word “vision”—a vision that provides hope. I have been counseling, and doing my best to provide SoulCare for people, for well over thirty years. And there are times that I get weary. There are times that if one more person tells me about a problem, I am going to explode. There are times when I just want to watch a ballgame. I do not want

**Vision** is based on **confidence** in the power of the **Spirit of God** to move through **anything** to accomplish **good purposes**.

**Good to those who love  
Jesus is the good of  
becoming like Jesus.**

to hear about somebody's mess. I am not curious. I just want to insulate myself—phone off the hook, go to bed, watch a ballgame. The Bible says, “Do not be weary in well-doing.” The Bible says that we can “mount up with wings as eagles”—that the power of Christ, that the energy of Christ can actually keep us going, not that we are not going to get tired and need a break and need a Sabbath rest and need to get away from people occasionally and watch a ballgame—there is nothing wrong with that—but how do we maintain a forward momentum? Maybe it requires vision. Do I believe that the person with whom I am speaking could actually be different?

Sometimes I hear stories—and I have heard thousands of stories—sometimes I hear stories of not only the second shoe dropped, but the third shoe, and a fourth shoe, and fifth shoe, and I have said to myself, “I don't know how this person is ever going to come out of this.” And I wish that they had never brought it to my attention because all I do is feel discouraged. I do not have much of a vision sometimes. And what that means is I do not have confidence in the power of the Spirit to move through anything to accomplish good purposes. What is your vision? That life will work well? Kids will turn out right? Marriages will get better? No, no, no. Make your vision something so much higher than this life working. Make your vision so high that what you are saying is that everything that happens in this life—all the good stuff, all the bad stuff, and anything in between—it all can work together in the hands of the master designer to bring about good. Well, what is good? Good to those who love Jesus, is the good of becoming like Jesus. Now we are back to the compelling vision of SoulCare that I spoke about earlier. Do I have a vision as I get curious about your life of what could be, and does hope follow naturally along?

The old French spiritual director, a man named Jean-Pierre de Caussade said, “Everything leads me to God.” I think Saint John of the Cross, if he were here, I think he would say the same thing. I think he would say that “Even the darkest night of my soul, when my fellow monks rejected me and had me imprisoned for a number of months; and I went through a period where I felt the hatred of everybody, and I felt like God was a million miles away; and the darkness was overwhelming to my soul; that somehow through all of those experiences, an appetite for God surfaced that made me realize that I want Him more than I want anyone or anything else. Everything helps me to God, even dark nights of the soul.” That sentence—that “everything leads me to God”—reflects a confidence in God's power to redeem every present



**"Everything** leads me to **God."**  
— Jean-Pierre de Caussade

reality as a pathway to knowing God better and becoming more like Jesus. You see, as you move toward someone with profound curiosity about what is going on, if you enter somebody's life without distancing yourself to handle only that which you can manage (remember self-management— that strong drive within us), if I get to know you and say, "No, I am not going to limit my knowledge of you to only those parts of you that I can deal with," or I can handle, or I can assimilate in my worldview. I am going to get to know everything about you. At times, I'm going to feel like throwing my hands up. I don't get it. This is so difficult. This is so mysterious. This is so hard. I do not know what can happen."

If you move with profound curiosity into somebody's life, you need to have a vision to accompany the curiosity. You need to have a vision that something can happen in this person's life by the power of God, and it can happen through no power that is less than the power of God. This person, in the middle of their situation, whatever it is, could actually resemble Jesus Christ more than they do right now. Is that your vision? That is the vision that drives SoulCare.

You need to have a **vision** that something can happen in this **person's life** by the **power of God**, and that it can happen through **no power** that is **less than** the **power of God**.

I was once speaking to a group of men, and I challenged them to do something specific. I said to them two things. I said, "First I want you to reflect on something that is happening in the lives of your children." Most of the men in the audience were parents, and we talked about their kids, and I said, "Will you all just think of one of your children, maybe one of your kids that might be a burden to you at the moment for whatever reason. I want you to do this now, as you think about this troubled child that you are concerned about, I would like you to write a letter: 'Dear Denise' or 'Dear Freddie, here is my vision for what you can become, and what I pray that God will empower me to help you become. I have seen something in you that is alive, and I long for it to develop into the full-blown life of Jesus Christ within you.'" I challenged them to write a letter to their children—a vision letter, I called it. I heard later that one of the men in the audience wrote a letter, and the gist of the letter was, it was not exactly this, but the gist of it was this: "Dear Carrie, (a daughter that was causing him great trouble, a daughter with whom he was having incredible friction, real tensions), I see in you a beautiful woman with a tender, loving heart who longs to give herself to deeply good purposes. I am so privileged to be your dad. You have a unique power to draw people to deep relationships in which they feel important and valuable. And we can feel your beautiful power."

I learned that after the conference, he went home and he walked up to his daughter and he said, “Honey, I have something for you, and I would like you to read it.” And she read the letter. (I wish this happened all of the time, but it does not—but it does happen sometimes.) This girl read the letter, and she burst into tears—a sixteen-year-old girl—she fell into her daddy’s arms, the first time she had let her daddy hug her in months and months and months.

To have a vision for somebody can be a very powerful thing. I have a good friend, a godly woman, who makes wedding veils for groups of ladies and tells them to talk about their beauty as the bride of Christ and about the way they soil that beauty but how it remains anyhow, and after talking about these things, this wonderful saint of a woman, takes these wedding veils and places them individually on each of the women’s heads in the room. She says, “You are the bride of Christ. I have a vision for your beauty that is within you that could develop as the years continue.” The effect on their souls was profound.

Curiosity and vision. Do you know if you are not curious, what you are going to be? You are going to be analytical. The opposite of curiosity is to analyze, to figure out how you can be in control. How many times have you shared something with somebody, and they have said, “Well, the way I see it, I think this is the way it is ... and this is how I would explain it ... and this is what I think that you should do.” How do you feel? Is your soul cared for? Or do you just get annoyed? Curiosity, not analysis. Vision, not pressure. So often, we feel a pressure. “Well, this person wants me to change in a variety of ways as opposed to, “here’s what could happen to this person’s beautiful soul if the Spirit of God got hold of him.” What is your attitude as you move into the battle for somebody’s soul? Curiosity and a vision, which brings hope, which releases the good passions within you to start coming out and to move into their soul in a way which invigorates their appetite for Christ.

**Curiosity,**  
not analysis

**Vision,**  
not pressure

*Christ-Centered Learning — Anytime, Anywhere*