

Getting into the Battle: Moving Below the Waterline



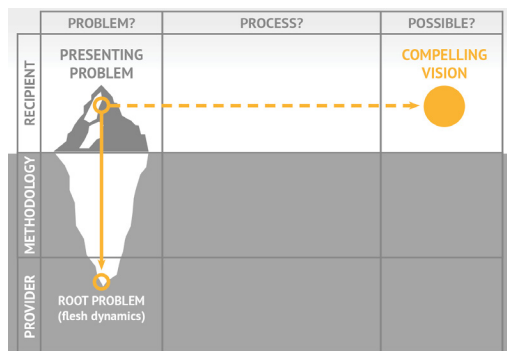
Larry J. Crabb, Ph.D.

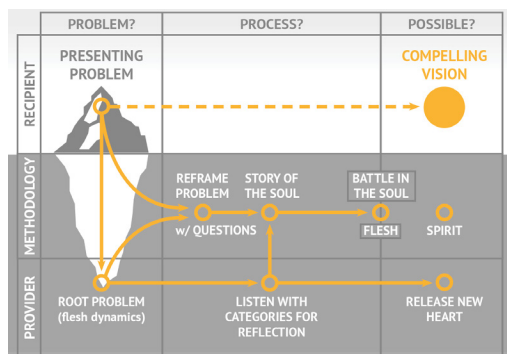
Experience: Founder and Director of NewWay Ministries in Silverthorne, Colorado

A passion/wisdom model of SoulCare. The focus now is on wisdom. What is a basic strategy for moving with wisdom into the depths of somebody else's soul? Let me give you a sketch, a sketch that at first might look a little bit complex, but if we go through it slowly enough, I think you will see that there is a simplicity to it that will, at the same time, guide you as you converse with somebody about the depths of their soul, but will not give you enough specificity to do without the Spirit of Christ. It is a guide that requires the Spirit for it to move well into somebody else's life.

Here is how I think about it. You are chatting with somebody, and they make known to you a presenting problem. The opportunity for SoulCare begins, or at least takes a particular shape, when a friend, a counselee, somebody in your pastor's office, says to you, "Pastor, I'm struggling." He says to you over lunch, "My friend, I'm hurting. I have got this going on. I am confused. I do not know what is happening." They present a problem. Now, the sketch develops this way. From "presenting problem," the person who is providing SoulCare needs to immediately think "vision." We need to ask the question, not "what's wrong?" but "what's possible?" There needs to be a mood of excitement, a mood of anticipation—not a mood of correction and judgment, and fixing and repair, but a mood of, "Here is where a person is, but I have confidence, (the SoulCarer must be saying) from the bottom of my soul that a vision emerges within me that the Spirit of God could actually bring about in this individual's life." So from: "presenting problem" to "vision." Now, when you realize what a person could become, but realize that they are not there, then you do start having to ask the hard question of, "Well, exactly what is wrong? What is the root problem? What is happening beneath the waterline in the depths of this individual's soul that is a problem? What is the real problem in the person's life?"

Now I am going to suggest to you—let me get ahead of myself just a moment here—I am going to suggest to you that the best

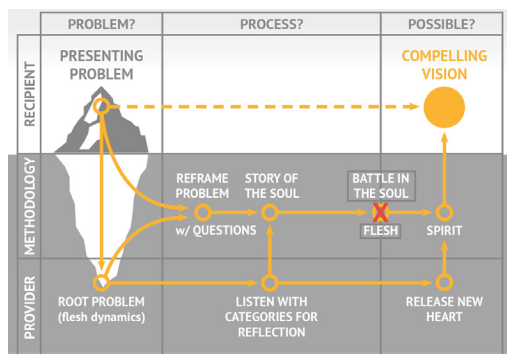




way to understand the problem beneath the presenting problems, the root problems, the deep problems, in the interior world, beneath the problems in the exterior world, is to think in terms of what I choose to call “flesh dynamics.” You have all heard the phrase “psychological dynamics”—the phrase that actually was popularized by Freud in 1895 when he began to think with us about the fact that there are forces going on, dynamic forces, happening in the core of the human personality that need to be understood. Well, I want to suggest that a more biblical way of thinking about what is happening inside of us that is bad, that is wrong, that is troublesome, is not to think of psychological dynamics, but rather to think of flesh dynamics. Now with this thought in your mind—and we will look at this more carefully as time goes on—what I am suggesting we do is, as people make known their presenting problem, that we actually reframe the problem with questions.

We take the problem that person presents, and we put a different frame around it. We say, “Yes, you have gotten very angry about such and such. I would like to know more about your anger in the general story of your life. I would like to hear about you anger with your relationships.” And by asking certain kinds of questions that we will look at carefully, we encourage the person to start talking, not about their presenting problems only—we do not diminish those or ignore those—but we shift away from the focus on presenting problem to a focus on what I like to call, “the story of a soul.” We want to provide SoulCare. We want to provide care for the deepest part of the human personality, not just advice or empathy or support for presenting problems. We want to provide SoulCare. So we encourage the person with well-chosen questions to think about the story of their relationships, the story of their present important relationships, the story of their past important relationships, the story of their immediate relationship with you, even as you are speaking back and forth, the story of their deepest relationship with God.

Then as we begin talking about this, we listen. But we listen with categories for reflection. As you are telling me the story of your life, what is happening in my mind? How am I thinking about what you are telling me? Am I understanding it? Do I have a roadmap for knowing how to understand what is happening in you as you talk about the fact that your mother was never there?—as you talk about the fact that your mother was your worst critic, as you talk about the fact that your father was an alcoholic, and a friendly alcoholic who laughed a lot when he got drunk and how you actually encouraged him to drink more to make him happier?



And as you tell some of those stories to me, do I have categories for reflecting meaningfully on those stories in a way that as we chat together over time, allows the real battle in your soul to become clear? Do I begin to understand the battle that is going on in your soul? Do I realize that this battle is really the battle that Paul talks about in several epistles: the battle between the flesh and the spirit, the new reality that God has put within you? Do we begin to understand in your unique case—not in just general terms—but in your unique case, how this battle is working out in your life, the battle between the way you are trying to make your life work without God, and the way that the Spirit is calling you to move toward God with an appetite for Him? There is a battle in each of our souls that is between the flesh and the spirit. And then do I have the ability, the power, the wisdom to realize that there is something in me that, when released toward you, is the effect on that, to move toward this huge battle of yours, in flesh and spirit, in a way that causes the flesh to become less appealing? It causes the whole way you live your life under the flesh to be something that you just do not want to do as much because there is something else that you want to do more. And does the spirit within you begin to feel a new sense of life that moves you toward the vision that the Spirit of God has for you? That, to me, is a basic strategy for moving into peoples' life. It is a model, a model of wisdom.

Now, if we are going to follow that strategy, what I would like to do is I would like to take apart this model. I know that it can look imposing at first, but if you go real slow with me, I think you will see that it can be, not a confusing something or other that it will take twenty years of training to even begin to understand how to do it—it is not that at all—it is really very simple; but let us just take it a step at a time and go very slowly through the model. In this presentation, I want to cover just a couple of the top items. The SoulCare opportunity begins when someone makes known their presenting problem to you, the one who provides SoulCare, who knows that relationships are vital, who feels inadequate, who knows your own self-centeredness, who is broken over that, who has a vision for the person, who is curious—all of those things are present within you now—and somebody shares this problem with you. What I want to talk about with you is how do you respond to the presenting problem? As the problem is shared, what needs to be happening in you as you begin to enter the battle for the soul?

Someone lets you know—let's make it something that will sound a little bit silly— someone lets you know (you are a couple of

buddies chatting over lunch), and one friend says to you, “You know, I really get mad at the dumbest things. Last night the toilet overflowed and I lost my temper, and I really screamed and hollered and made a mess of things. I just really handled it poorly. And I do not get why I get so upset over dumb little things that happen like that.” That is an opportunity for SoulCare. “Why do we get so mad about that? Man, that drove me nuts.” A person shares that with you over lunch. What is your natural response? “Yeah, me too. I get like that a lot.” That is not all bad, I do not suppose, but not much SoulCare is going to happen. “Well, did you have devotions that morning?” Maybe you wouldn’t be as simplistic as that. But how do you proceed?

When a person shares a problem, let me suggest to you that the initial response within the person providing effective SoulCare, the initial response to the presenting problem is “think vision.” Think vision. Do not talk vision. Do not begin by saying to the person, “I have a vision for you. My vision for you is that when the toilet overflows, you are going to sing the ‘Hallelujah Chorus.’” Do not get silly like that, but think vision. Think inside of yourself, “here is a human being who bears the image of God, who is fallen, who is redeemed. And they have a response of inappropriate anger that hurt their wife, that troubled their children, that was not a good thing to do at all.” They have this response of anger—maybe it is a much bigger thing, maybe it’s going to topless bars or maybe it’s having affairs or maybe it is swearing a lot—whatever the problem may be, whatever the problem is—initially begin, not by giving advice, not by talking to them about their problem, but think vision. Now let me tell you what I mean by that.

The initial response:
Think vision.

You are providing SoulCare for this friend of yours who presents this, what seems like perhaps a trivial problem: he lost his temper when something inconvenienced him, when the toilet overflowed. Suppose, if I could tape-record your mind as your friend shared that with you. Suppose I heard something like this—this is what I would mean by thinking vision—suppose the tape recorder in your mind indicated words like the following: “You know, my friend really does have a temper. I do not know what is going on. I haven’t got a clue why he gets so mad about that. I sure noticed it before, and here is one more illustration of it. I don’t know what is going on. But I do know that the Spirit right at this moment is present in our conversation. I do know right at this moment the Spirit is active in my friend’s life. He is moving because the Spirit always moves. And I believe that, and right now I am thinking about the fact that the Spirit of God, with all of His limitless power,

What might **God** be
wanting?

What might **He** be moving
toward?

Picture the person as **solid,**
anchored, and deep.

is moving in my friend's soul in the middle of this apparently trivial little minor difficulty. The very fact that my friend told me about this over lunch tells me that something's going on. I do not know what it is, but the Spirit is working." Can you start feeling a little tingle? Can you start getting a little bit excited? Can you think back to the Narnia series that C.S. Lewis wrote so wonderfully where he said, "Aslan's on the move." Something is happening. Can you start thinking "vision"?

And suppose in your mind, as I am tape-recording it, I hear something like this, you are saying to yourself, "You know, as I listen to my friend talk about this, an image comes to my mind. The first image of where he is right now, he seems like an empty, scared little kid that has to prove he can handle stuff. And when things go wrong he just gets petulant and frustrated and angry, like a little kid with the neighborhood kids who is trying to impress them. (You get this strange image, that might be all wrong, but it occurs to you, so you allow it to come to your mind.) And you think, "Well, that is my vision of where he is, not where I want him to be, not vision in the rich sense." But then your mind goes further, and you say, "You know, that's where he is, but I can picture something different about my friend. I can picture him as a solid, God-trusting man that nothing really threatens. That whether it is something that reveals his level of incompetence—he does not know how to handle little plumbing problems—or whether it is bigger things—he loses his job, whether it's far bigger—he discovers that he has cancer, but in the middle of whatever is happening, I can envision this guy as a solid man, who in the middle of all of the frustration and all of the failures, and all of the rest of it, that there is some thing that is anchored and deep and real within him. Man, wouldn't that be something? To believe that it is there in undeveloped form, but maybe because of our time together, that could become just a little more real. Maybe Christ could form in him. Man, I would love that." Suppose that is the way that you are thinking. I have not got a clue how to make all of that happen, but boy does that sound good! Your initial response is to think vision. That is what I mean by it.

Now do hear, that this suggestion that I am making to you in SoulCare of "think vision" when a problem is presented is very different than what most of us do. What most of us do is we don't think "vision"; we think "analysis." "What is wrong with this guy? Why would something like that get to him? Does he feel incompetent? That is the whole issue, isn't it? Is it that he is mad at his wife and is taking it out on the toilet? I mean, what is going

Typically we think **analysis**,
or in terms of **helping**.

When we think **vision**, it creates a
quiet place in our soul that leaves
room for the **Spirit to move**.

on with this guy? I have got to figure it out so that I can help him.” Do not begin by thinking analysis. And also—and this may be a little hard to understand—do not think “help”—“How can I help this guy? What do I have to do?” You are just going to feel pressured. And your friend will feel pressured, and he will wish he had never brought it up. Do not think “analysis.” Do not think “help.” Think “vision.” And when you think “vision,” let me tell you what happens inside of your soul.

When you think “vision,” it creates a spirit of prayer. It creates a space, a quiet space, within your own soul, that you are longing for the Spirit of God to fill. It creates a space in your own soul when you think about, “Here is where he is; here is where he could be. I long for that. Oh God, could I be useful to that? Let me open my ears, not to figuring him out, but to the Spirit, knowing the Spirit is moving in my friend’s life. Can I think about that?” You will think about that. That will be on your mind if you think “vision”—no pressure within you, no judgment within you of where he is, no retreat or meaningless support. All the don’ts are being avoided. Now, you listen. And you are asking questions because you are curious. You are thinking reflectively, not analytically. You are in the SoulCare because you thought “vision.” You have made a place for the Spirit to begin enlivening you, and now you are ready to begin moving into the man’s life with your mouth. You have already moved into his life with your heart. Now it is time to speak words.

As you think vision, and as you wait for the Spirit of God to lead you and to direct you—you do not wait passively; you wait very actively—you are sitting there, and you are thinking what this man could be, the image of him being solid as opposed to empty, and the Spirit of God leading me to help him to become more like that. Man, what an exciting thing. And then you start thinking about the presenting problem that he had actually presented to you. And your focus now—and here we come back to an earlier lesson—your focus now, is on (is the word “relentless” a good word here?—it has a bit of an antagonistic feel to it, but let me use it anyhow) a relentless curiosity, a curiosity that says, “I am so eager to know you that I really want to ask questions. I really want to know.”

Your focus is on curiosity, not on analysis, advice, or affirmation (the triple A’s of bad SoulCare). In response to, “I got so mad last night when the toilet overflowed. I don’t know why I get so mad, but man, I get mad a lot.” You thought vision ... you are thinking

Be **relentlessly curious** and ask questions about the **presenting problem**.

vision ... you have a space for the Spirit, and now you are curious. And you say something that, when I suggest the words to you will sound so simple, and you will say, “Well, anybody could think of that.” And that is my point. Anybody who is curious and who is thinking vision could think of this. And what they would say would be something simple. I can think of ten possibilities. One might be something like, “What did you do when you got so mad?” You are just curious. You would like to recreate the scene. You know, the toilet overflowed, the guy got mad. What does that mean? Does that mean that he took the lid off of the thing, and hurled it across the room? Does that mean he said a bad word? Did it mean that he just walked away and put on the television, and watched it for two hours? You are just curious. You want to know what your friend did when he got mad last night over this little inconvenience.

Now, notice the difference between curiosity, and judgment or pressure or analysis. I could ask the question, “Well, what did you do?” with a spirit of judgment. I could ask the question, “What did you do when handling that? You got so angry. Well, did you really lose your temper and yell at your wife? I want to see if you really mishandled this thing.” Or, it could be an analytical kind of a thing: “Well, I wonder what you did, because I am ready to put on my thinking cap and figure this thing out for you.” The words matter so much less than the energy beneath them. It really is not what you say that makes the big difference. It is why you say it and what is in you. That is why we spent so much time on the issue of passions, on the issue of what is alive within you as you say, “What did you do?” If what is alive within you is, “What did you do so that I can straighten you out?” Or, “What did you do that shows me your problem so that I can figure it all out?”—you are not doing SoulCare. But rather, if “what did you do,” [is the question] because this is your friend, and you would love to know what is happening in his life, if that is the energy behind your question, then you are a curious person who your friend would experience as safe.

When you ask, “What did you do?” with the energy of respectful curiosity, your friend’s response will be one of wanting to let you know, as opposed to: “Well, I will tell you a little bit, but not too much, because I do not want to get beat in the head by your moralism or repaired by your therapy.” The friend will rather say, “Well, I am glad that you asked. I guess, I am kind of ashamed to tell you this, but I said some words that I shouldn’t say, I guess, and I just got mad about the whole thing and stormed off, and

Words matter so **much less** than the **energy beneath** them.

my poor wife just had to put up with me for the evening, and I didn't feel very good." The ruling passion within you will help your friend feel safe enough to let you know what he is ashamed of. And that creates the opportunity for you to begin to know, to explore, to discover, and touch. He has opened up his life to you just a little bit.

At some point, the person will **underline a point of confusion.**

Now, when expressed curiosity is coupled with assumed vision, and both are energized by the energy (Spirit) of love, a good conversation of SoulCare is about to begin. That is how it works. The person is going to not merely complain and make known facts, but there is going to be—now, listen very carefully to an important point—when you do it the way we are suggesting, when there is a meaningful curiosity and you are thinking “vision”—and you are doing it all in the energy of love, and you say to your friend, “Well, what did you do?” and he begins telling you, and you ask for clarification, and you talk for ten or fifteen minutes about all of this—what is going to happen at some point is that your friend will, in the middle of his personal revelations, which are an invitation to you to know him, explore him, discover him, and touch him, as your friend begins making known his personal revelations, you are going to notice something in your friend. Now, what you are going to notice is a point of confusion. Your friend is going to highlight a point of confusion. He might say something like, “I don't know why I get so mad.” There is the confusion. Why is he telling you that? “I don't know why I get so mad. Yeah, it really upsets Peggy because, man, she puts up with this all of the time, and I guess I do get mad a lot. And it really isn't good. I know it isn't right. I just don't get it. I am so confused about it. I mean, how does a toilet overflowing have the power to make me into a seething, angry volcano that is exploding? I really got mad. I am not even sure who I got mad at, or what I got mad at, or what I got mad about. I don't understand it. I am just confused.”

When your friend is at a point of confusion, when your curiosity leads your friend to any acknowledgment of confusion, the tension has been created for you to enter your friend's soul. There is a good tension, a creative tension. A problem has been shared, and the person had made known, “I am a mystery to myself. Beneath the waterline, I don't know what is going on, and I am confused.” It is at that point that you can then begin to shift from presenting problem to the story of the soul. It is at that point that you can begin to ask questions, questions that direct the person away from the specifics of “what happened with the toilet,” and “what he did with his anger,” and move away from the specifics of that,

At some point, the person will **underline a point of confusion.**

The necessary tension has now been **created for you** to enter the **person's soul.**

| Reframing questions move toward:

- **present-important relationships**
- **past-important relationships**

which you have spent fifteen or twenty minutes, thirty minutes, forty minutes talking about. But then the point of tension comes. “I don’t know why I get like that.” That is the opportunity. That is the door that has been opened by your friend for you to begin asking a different kind of question, questions that reframe the problem from a specific moment that was poorly handled to a specific moment that is part of a larger story of a soul who is struggling in his or her relationships. That is when you begin to reframe. From, “Why do I get so mad? How can I stop it?” to “I wonder what is going on in my important relationships?”

It is not just a matter of learning anger control techniques. It is not just a matter of analyzing the source of anger at that moment and learning to cognitively say new sentences to yourself that stop you from being so mad at the moment—it is not a matter of that sort of thing. It is a matter of moving from the presenting problem to the story of a soul. You begin asking reframing questions. What do I mean by that? Ask questions that move in four simple directions—one direction toward present-important relationships. You might ask a question like, “What does Peggy do when you get mad like that?” That is a reframing question. You have shifted from anger and inconvenience to a relational issue—i.e., “What does Peggy do?” That is a present-important relationship—that is what you talk about first.

Secondly, you might ask a question about past-important relationships. “You know you talk about this. Did you ever get mad when you were a kid like this? You know, did your dad ever drive you nuts or did you ever work with your dad in the shop and make a mistake, and your dad yelled at you for it? I would just love to know about your past a little bit. I am not trying to play psychologist. You are my friend, and I care about you. I would like to know about the story of your soul.” So you ask about some past-important relationships.

And then thirdly—and this a little tricky—you might ask a question that has to do with the present-immediate relationship between you and your friend. You might say something like, “You know, as you tell me that, can I tell you what stirs inside of me? Can I tell you what I feel right now? And can I tell you that I am really glad to have you as a friend? You drive me nuts in some ways, but here are the ways that I am just thrilled to have you as my friend. Because, yeah you get mad a lot, but there is something in you that just feels alive. I am just so glad that we are friends.” You might make it personal like that, and ask a question about a

Reframing questions move toward:

- present-important relationships
- past-important relationships
- the present-immediate relationship
- their relationship with God

present-immediate relationship between you and your friend.

Fourthly, and obviously most pivotally, you might ask a reframing question to get into the story of the soul about the person's most important relationship, deepest relationship, eternal relationship with God. And you might say something simple. Do not try to find the right question, the exact wording. You might say something like, "How do you think about God when you are so mad?" Or, "After you get over your anger, and you are sitting there realizing, you know, what a fool you made of yourself, how do you visualize God? I mean, if He were to walk into the room, what expression would you see on His face?" Or, whatever question occurs to you about God, just to get people talking about that.

From "hearing the presenting problem" to "thinking vision" to "curiosity about the presenting problem" that leads to a "reframing of the present problem," the presenting problem into the story of the soul, now do you see what has happened? Now you are listening to the story of the soul, and you are listening to the story of the soul with hope because you have been thinking "vision." What do you do as you listen? How do you think about what you are hearing? How do you move with what you are hearing? That is the topic in our last lesson.