Chapter One

The Soul Physician' s Desk Reference Manual

"Pastoral care is defective unless it can deal thoroughly with the evils we have suffered as well as with the sins we have committed" (Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology*, p. 21).

"The task of theological anthropology is to set forth the Christian understanding of what it means to be human" (Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, p. 23).

The Tale of Two Counselors

Several years ago Jim shared his story with me. His uncle had repeatedly sexually abused him while he was in elementary school. Jim never told a soul about the damage in his soul until he finally found the courage to tell a pastoral counselor. Hear Jim's words.

> "Bob, it was incredibly hard. I felt so ashamed, but I got the words out—sobbing as I shared. The second I finished, my counselor whipped out his Bible, turned to Genesis 3, and preached a thirty-minute message on sin. Bob, it wasn't even a good sermon! But worse than that, I knew that I was a sinner. I'm clueless as to how my pastoral counselor intended to relate that passage to my situation. At that second, did I need a sermon on my personal sin?"

Jim did not return for his second session with his pastoral counselor. Instead, he arranged an appointment with a professional Christian counselor. Here is Jim's rendition of his second counseling experience.

> "Bob, at first things went well. My counselor seemed to be able to relate to me, seemed to have compassion for what I went through. But after two months of counseling I was ready to have him help me move beyond sympathy and empathy. I knew that I wasn't loving my wife and kids like Christ wanted me to. But my counselor kept telling me that I was too hard on myself and that I was too damaged to love the way I wanted to love."

The tale of two counselors. One hears a sordid story of sexual abuse and immediately responds to his sobbing counselee with a sermon on sin. The second hears his counselee's longing to move beyond damage to dignity, from victim to victorious, and informs him that he's too disabled to fully function. These two diverse approaches illustrate the ongoing divide concerning what makes Christian counseling Christian. What biblical perspectives guided the thinking of Jim's pastoral counselor? What biblical premises did Jim's professional Christian counselor follow? Just what is biblical counseling? What is its focus? Its foundation?

The SPDR

Two books are standard in any physician's office: *The Physician's Desk Reference* (*PDR*) and *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy* (*Merck*). Both are considered "Bibles of medical knowledge and practice." With its 3,223 pages of prescription drugs, the annually updated *PDR* is the most comprehensive, widely used drug reference available. It details the usage, warnings, and precautions for more than 4,000 prescription drugs. *Merck* is the most widely used medical text in the world. It provides the latest information on the vast expanse of human diseases, disorders, and injuries, as well as their symptoms and treatments. Intended for physicians, it is still useful for the lay person. As one sage has commented, "a must for everyone in a human body."

If the *PDR* and *Merck* are the Old Testament and New Testament for physicians treating the body, then the Bible is God's final, authoritative word for soul physicians treating the soul. It is the soul physician's desk reference manual for dispensing grace. It's "a must for anyone who is a soul." God's Word provides not only the latest, but the eternal, lasting information on the soul's design and disease, as well as its care and cure.

What do we discover as we read the pages of the *Soul Physician's Desk Reference* (*SPDR*)? We learn what makes Christian counseling Christian. We learn our Great Physician's authoritative truth about:

- Nourishing the Hunger of the Soul: Preventative Medicine—God's Word
- Knowing the Creator of the Soul: The Great Physician—The Trinity
- Examining the Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul: People—Creation
- Diagnosing the Fallen Condition of the Soul: Problems—Fall
- Prescribing God's Cure for the Soul: Solutions—Redemption
- Envisioning the Final Healing of the Soul: Home—Glorification
- Dispensing God's Care for the Soul: Spiritual Friends—Sanctification

These seven biblical categories are essential for developing a theology of soul care and spiritual direction. We will examine them meticulously, as a physician would the skeletal structure of the human body.

Nourishing the Hunger of the Soul: Preventative Medicine—God's Word

Doctoring the body does not begin with the treatment of illness, but with the preventative maintenance of health. Knowing how to keep the body healthy requires that we understand what the body needs. What diet? What nutrients?

So it is with doctoring the soul. What does the soul need? What nutrients? We nourish the hunger of our soul by living *coram Deo sola scriptura*: face-to-face with God by Scripture alone. *Deo* is Latin for God; *coram* is Latin for in the presence of, face-to-face with. Martin Luther used *coram Deo* to depict that we live with reference to God every second in every situation. Luther taught that all existence found its final meaning and ultimate object in God and that all emotions, actions, volitions, cognitions, and relations had God as their circumference. He perceived that all of life was a story of personal encounter with God and that the deepest questions in the human soul were God questions. Luther used the term *sola scriptura* to emphasize his conviction that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

If we are to use the Bible to nourish hungry souls, then we must hear the Bible's story the way God tells it. And God tells it like it is. The message of the Bible teaches us that *life is a war and a wedding*.

Life is a *war*—a grand adventure in which God calls us to die daily. Life is a battleground—an epic quest to join God in the ultimate defeat of his archenemy—Satan.

Life is a *wedding*—a passionate romance in which Christ calls us to love intimately. Life is a battle for our love—the ageless question of who captures our heart—Christ or Satan.

We win the war and wed our Worthy Groom through the power of God's Word. But what does this mean? Does dispensing God's Word mean that we tell our counselees and parishioners to "take two Scriptures and call us in the morning"? Does it mean that life is so simple that it consists of a one-problem-one-verse-one-solution formula? No. Not if life is a war and a wedding.

Dispensing truth means that we derive our understanding of earthly life from heaven's viewpoint. We intersect Christ's eternal story and our temporal story; we connect his heavenly perspective and our earthly perspective; we look at life not with eyeballs only, but with spiritual eyes; we live under the *Son*, not under the *sun*.

Soul physicians master at least three core counselor competencies for using God's truth: trialogues, spiritual conversations, and scriptural explorations. In a monologue, I talk to you, teach you, or preach to you. In a dialogue, the two of us converse back and forth. However, in a trialogue, you and I engage a third party in our interaction—the Holy Spirit by way of his inspired Word. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20, KJV). Counseling is a powerful trialogue interaction about God's Word between three people—a counselor, a counselee, and the Wonderful Counselor.

In spiritual conversations, the counselor and counselee explore together how *biblical principles* relate to daily life—how God's larger story relates to our smaller stories. In scriptural explorations, the counselor and counselee explore together what relevance and application a *specific passage* may have to the counselee's life story.

How do you handle a hungry soul? With truth—God's truth about life as a war and a wedding—dispensed with wisdom and love.

Knowing the Creator of the Soul: The Great Physician—The Trinity

Some Christian counseling models begin with salvation, others with sin, still others begin with the beginning. We start earlier. Exploring eternity, or before the beginning, helps us to address the question, "What is the nature of reality?" Knowing the Trinitarian Creator of our soul helps us to answer that question: "Reality is relational." Before time began, God existed in community—the sacred community of the holy Trinity. Reality is relational because God is social, communal, never once alone, but forever in intimate personal interaction within the Trinity. Created in the image of our Triune God, we are relational. This central awareness shapes every aspect of our soul care model.

Knowing the Great Physician also helps us to know his creation. To understand image bearers, we must first understand the One whose image we bear.

Additionally, beginning before the beginning enables us to understand what went wrong. Through probing the fall of Satan, who once led the angelic hosts in worshipping the Trinity, we expose the hidden spiritual warfare at work behind every temptation to sin. We learn not only the onset of the evil disease that infects image bearers, but also how Satan attempts to spread the virus of sin.

Examining the Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul: People—Creation

Three categories typically form the core of biblical counseling: people, problems, and solutions. Everyone involved in the personal ministry of the Word must ponder these three constructs.

- Creation: How to understand *people* biblically–the nature of human nature.
- Fall: How to diagnose *problems* theologically–the root causes of sin and suffering.
- Redemption: How to prescribe *solutions* scripturally–the pathway to growth in grace.

I still remember the day I was introduced to this way of thinking about life. It was the first day of my first Bible college class. More than a hundred intimidated freshmen awaited the arrival of Dr. Lawler. The bespectacled, diminutive Old Testament scholar's reputation preceded him. When he entered, all chatter ceased. Staring us down, he said, "Repeat after me. Creation. Fall. Redemption."

"Creation. Fall. Redemption," we mimicked in unison.

"Never, ever forget those three words," he instructed us. "They summarize the entire story of the Bible."

I label them the *CFR Narrative* which condenses God's story of life through the lenses of his Creation, our Fall, and our Redemption in Christ. Box 1:1 illustrates and explains God's Creation, Fall, Redemption story.

Box 1:1
The CFR Narrative: Creation, Fall, Redemption

The Bible tells one story in three stages: Creation, Fall, Redemption. These stages condense the story of life into its three grand themes. To understand how to help hurting and hardened people, we must comprehend the nature of God's CFR Narrative.

- **Creation** describes how life was meant to be lived. It provides us with a glimpse into what healthy living looks like from God's perspective, according to his intentions.
- **Fall** explains how life became the distorted mess that it is today. It demonstrates why things are not the way they are supposed to be.
- **Redemption** shows us how we can live life as we find it through Christ's resurrection power. It explains the way back to health—to shalom, to wholeness.

Creation, Fall, and Redemption are theological terms that summarize the message of the Bible. However, they are not the only terms that we can use. Notice other compelling descriptions.

Creation	Fall	Redemption
People	Problems	Solutions
Psychology	Psychopathology	Psychotherapy
God's Design	Human Sin	God's Salvation
Design	Depravity	Dignity
Soul Study	Soul Sickness	Soul Healing
Soul Order	Soul Disorder	Soul Reorder
Anthropology	Hamartiology	Soteriology
Genius	Madness	Reawakening
Genius	Grief	Grace
Generation	Degeneration	Regeneration
Paradise	Paradise Lost	Paradise Restored
Paradise	Cistern	Spring
Health	Sickness	Healing
Ideal	Ordeal	Real
Connection	Alienation	Reconciliation
Integrated Self	Scattered Self	Gathered Self
Capacity	Incapacity	Competency

As I have noted, some models of biblical counseling begin not at the beginning, but at the Fall. They act as if the way things now are, is the way things were meant to be. However, life as we now find it, is not the way it was supposed to be.

In the film *Grand Canyon*, an attorney attempts to bypass a traffic jam. His route takes him along streets that are progressively darker and more deserted. His expensive car stalls on a secluded street patrolled by a local gang. The attorney manages to phone for a tow truck, but before it arrives three young thugs surround his disabled car and threaten his life. Then, just in the nick of time, the tow truck driver arrives. Savvy enough to understand what is about to go down, the driver takes the leader of the group aside to introduce him to metaphysics.

"Man," he says, "the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here" (Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, p. 7, introduced me to this outlook).

The Creation narrative teaches us how we were meant to live life with God and with each other. It also teaches us God's original design for the soul—the nature of human nature as bearers of God's image (the *imago Dei*). It enables us to answer the questions, "What is health? What does a healthy image bearer look like?"

My wife still talks about her *Anatomy 101* college course. Shudders, might be the better description. Her "favorite" memory was her dissection of a mink. The purpose was not to end up with a mink coat, but to gain an understanding of the inner physical structure of mammals.

In *Soul Physicians*, we will examine the anatomy of the soul. We will gain an understanding of the inner psychological structure of human beings as generated by God (Creation), degenerated by sin (Fall), and regenerated by grace (Redemption).

Our examination of biblical psychology will reveal that each human being has the following capacities of personhood:

- Relational Beings: Romancers—Affections (Longing)
- Rational Beings: Dreamers—Mindsets (Thinking)
- Volitional Beings: Creators—Purposes (Choosing)
- Emotional Beings: Singers—Mood States (Feeling)
- Physical Beings: Actors —Habituated Tendencies (Acting)

Various models of Christian counseling tend to emphasize one of these capacities of personhood. Truly biblical counseling understands and addresses all of them.

Various models of Christian counseling tend to emphasize our original personality structure (Creation), or our fallen personality structure (Fall), or our saved personality structure (Redemption). Once again, truly biblical counseling understands and addresses all of these.

Box 1:2 (Soul Anatomy 101) portrays the fundamental nature of human nature as created, fallen, and redeemed. We will flesh out God's anatomy of our soul throughout *Soul Physicians*.

Box 1:2
Soul Anatomy 101

Created Personality Structure

1. Relational Beings: Romancers Loving Passionately—Affections
   a. Spiritual Beings: Communion
   b. Social Beings: Community/Connected
   c. Self-Aware Beings: Conscience
2. Rational Beings: Dreamers Thinking Wisely—Mindsets
   a. Images
   b. Beliefs
3. Volitional Beings: Creators Choosing Courageously—Purposes
   a. Intentions/Goals
   b. Actions/Behaviors
4. Emotional Beings: Singers Experiencing Deeply—Mood States
   a. Responding to Our Inner World
   b. Responding to Our Outer World
5. Physical Beings: Actors Living Fully—Habituated Tendencies

Fallen Personality Structure

1. Fallen Relational Beings: Adulterers—Impure Affections
2. Fallen Rational Beings: Fools—Fleshly Mindsets
3. Fallen Volitional Beings: Destroyers—Self-Centered Purposes
4. Fallen Emotional Beings: Addicts—Ungoverned Mood States
5. Fallen Physical Beings: Traitors—Disconnected Habituated Tendencies

Redeemed Personality Structure

1. Redeemed Relational Beings: Virgin Brides—Purified Affections
2. Redeemed Rational Beings: Penetrating Sages—Renewed Mindsets
3. Redeemed Volitional Beings: Empowering Shepherds—Other-Centered Purposes
4. Redeemed Emotional Beings: Soulful Poets—Managed Mood States
5. Redeemed Physical Beings: Connected Characters—Reconnected Habituated Tendencies

Diagnosing the Fallen Condition of the Soul: Problems—Fall

As important as it is to return to Creation, we would be naïve to end our journey here. God didn't. The true story of life must include the sad story of our descent into the abyss of sin.

Though sad and tragic, without this story we could never make sense of life. People all around us are asking, "How do you explain life as we now find it?" They may not word it quite like that. Perhaps it sounds more like, "How could a good God allow such evil and suffering?" "Would a loving God really send people to hell?" "If God is so good, then why did he allow my daughter to be accidentally run over and killed by my husband right in our driveway?"

Life as it now exists is inexplicable apart from understanding the truth of the Fall. The narrative of the Fall teaches us that our present condition neither corresponds to our original state nor to God's ultimate design for us.

By dissecting the fallen soul, we are able to diagnose the impact of sin on the human personality and predicament. Throughout *Soul Physicians*, we will learn about sin's deep impact upon our fallen motivational structure—why we do what we do. We will come to understand and apply issues such as false lovers of the soul, idols of the heart, self-centered purposes/pathways, and ungoverned mood states. We will also learn about suffering in a fallen world and our response to it. Specifically, we will contrast and compare the world's method of grieving with a biblical model of healing—sufferology.

Prescribing God's Cure for the Soul: Solutions—Redemption

If the Bible ended with the Fall, life would be hopeless and we would despair. Thankfully, God's story moves to Redemption.

The Bible is comedy, not tragedy. No, not comedy as in modern-day situation comedies that wrap up every problem in twenty-three minutes, but comedy in the classic sense of that word in literature.

The Bible would follow the literary form of tragedy if it stopped at the Fall. Tragedy moves from a wonderful beginning to a horrible ending without any resolution.

The second episode in the original *Star Wars Trilogy* was tragedy. *The Empire Strikes Back* told a tale that began with the victory of the Republic (the "good guys"), but ended with their defeat at the hands of Darth Vader and the Empire (the "bad guys"). To this day, that film is the least watched and liked of all the *Star War* movies. No one enjoys tragedy. Yet we all experience it.

The Bible, though not denying the tragedy of the Fall, is comedic in scope. Like all classic comedy, it begins on a high note, moves to a note of despair, but ends triumphantly. Thus we have Redemption. We learn how to live life as we now find it. More than that, we are rescued from our old life and empowered to live the new life.

The award winning movie *A Beautiful Mind* is classic comedy. It's the story of the mystery of the human mind in three acts: genius, madness, and reawakening.

John Nash enters Princeton as one of the top two mathematical scholars in the United States. Here we find genius—Creation—life as God intended it. Nash has the uncanny ability to see the big picture. The eyes of his mind have perfect 20/20 vision.

However, as we follow John's life, we move to madness—the insanity of the schizophrenia that engulfs his once beautiful mind. In his paranoia, he imagines roommates, little girls, government agents, and a plot not only to take his life, but to

bomb vital American cities. This is the Fall; it is not the way things were supposed to be for John.

Through perseverance, medication, treatment, family and community support, John fights back. He has at least a partial reawakening. His "redemption" comes when he receives the Nobel Prize for his totally new mathematical theory of economics. Although his reawakening is a pale reflection of the Redemption offered by Christ, it does give us a glimpse of our final hope.

Nash's life is a microcosm of all human existence. We have fallen from our God-created state of shalom—health and wholeness, to a Satan-inspired state of shame—sickness and dis-integration, and we're invited to enter a Christ-initiated state of grace—healing and restoration.

At times we mistakenly counsel Christians as if they were non-Christians. We view our clients or parishioners only through the lens of depravity. This is like a heart surgeon transplanting a perfectly healthy new heart into her patient, but then treating her patient as if he still has his old heart in his chest.

We are new creations with a new *nature*: regeneration and redemption. God has implanted a new heart into the core of our being with new power to live godly lives. We have a new *nurture*: reconciliation and justification. Christ provides a new relationship of complete acceptance with God and freedom from condemnation. We are cleansed and forgiven.

In *Soul Physicians*, we will explore how these truths about who we are *in* Christ and *to* Christ dramatically alter how we counsel and disciple one another. We are people who have rejected false idols for the true God; people who have rejected filthy cisterns for God, the Spring of Living Water; people who are no longer disordered, but reordered. These realities about our newness in Christ guide every interaction and intervention when counseling fellow Christians.

We will learn about the power of Christ's gospel of grace, not only to save us, but to sanctify us. To grow spiritually we must live *coram Deo sola gratia*: face-to-face with God by grace alone. We are in-relationship-to-Deity beings designed with a fundamental nature which must worship. God designed humans to trust, to place faith in, and to display loyalty to Someone who transcends the self. When healthy and sane, we orient ourselves with our faces to God. When unhealthy and senseless, we orient ourselves with our backs to God. Sane or senseless, we are God-oriented people—*coram Deo* people.

We can translate the Latin phrase *sola gratia* as "by grace alone"—*gratia* being grace and *sola* being alone, solely. Our soul's necessary nutrient is grace. Even prior to the entrance of sin into the universe, our existence was by grace. God never needed us, so his creation of us was a gift. Having sinned, his grace became all the more evident and indispensable. Christ died for us while we were sinners, while we were yet his enemies, while we were still ungodly (Romans 5:1-11).

Every non-biological problem is a grace-deficiency problem. Our souls starve, shrink, and struggle either because we have never received God's gracious acceptance in Christ or because having received his grace, we are now bewitched by Satan to live by works and blinded by Satan to reject our acceptance.

For biological deficiencies we need physical nutrients and medicinal cures. Thus, most doctors spend much of their time as dispensers of medicine. Soul physicians are

dispensers of grace. We spend most of our time either bringing others into a grace relationship with Christ or helping them to accept their acceptance in Christ. In *suffering*, people need grace to help in their time of need and pain, doubt and confusion. In *sinning*, people need grace to experience forgiveness in times of defeat and besetting sin, idolatrous attitudes and false loves. In *sanctification*, people need grace to equip them for power, love, and wisdom.

The heart of *Soul Physicians* revolves around understanding how to help new creations with a new heart to live healthy lives. Step by step, we'll build an in-depth, practical theology of sanctification (*sancticology*). We'll equip you to empower others to put off the "flesh" and to put on the new person they already are in Christ.

Envisioning the Final Healing of the Soul: Home—Glorification

Creation, Fall, and Redemption summarize life on planet Earth. However, we are everlasting beings. Just as we began our diagnosis with a look into eternity past, so we end our prognosis with a peek into eternity future. What is our destiny? Does our future destiny make any difference during our present suffering? Does our future destiny make any difference to our current sinfulness?

Our future destiny is home—sacred communion within God's holy and happy family. Our present sufferings, the Apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 8, are not worthy to be compared with our future glory. Paul also reminds us in Romans 8 that we groan with hope for the coming day when we will be glorified—renewed into the image of Jesus Christ. In counseling, we fan into flame hope, resilience, longsuffering, patience, power, love, and wisdom by reminding our spiritual friends that we've read the end of the story.

Dispensing God's Care for the Soul: Spiritual Friends—Sanctification

The first six biblical categories (preventative medicine, the Great Physician, people, problems, solutions, and home) we will explore sequentially. The seventh area—spiritual friends—we will integrate into every aspect of *Soul Physicians*. In fact, I've devoted an entire book to it (*Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*). Since I integrate dispensing God's care for the soul into *Soul Physicians*, it's vital that I introduce you to it now. Does the Bible, does Church history, provide us with an approach to soul care and spiritual direction that is powerful and practical, biblical and relevant, comprehensive and comprehendible? I am convinced that they do. In the pages to come, I will introduce you to soul care through sustaining and healing and to spiritual direction through reconciling and guiding. (*Spiritual Friends* walks you through a detailed training process that equips you to develop twenty-two relational competencies necessary to practice the art of spiritual friendship.) Box 1:3 pictures this biblical approach to Christian counseling, outlining the following process (see page 22):

Box 1:3
Soul Care and Spiritual Direction
Sustaining, Healing, Reconciling, and Guiding

Soul Care: The Evils We Have Suffered

"God Is Good Even When Life Is Bad"

Soul care givers compassionately identify with people in pain
and redirect them to Christ and the Body of Christ
to sustain and heal their faith so they experience
communion with Christ and conformity to Christ
as they love God (exalt God by enjoying and trusting him) and love others.

Sustaining: *"It's Normal to Hurt"*

Sense Your Spiritual Friend's Story of Despair
Empathize with and Embrace Your Spiritual Friend

Healing: *"It's Possible to Hope"*

Stretch Your Spiritual Friend to God's Story of Hope
Encourage Your Spiritual Friend to Embrace God

Spiritual Direction: The Sins We Have Committed

"God Is Gracious Even When I Am Sinful"

Spiritual directors understand spiritual dynamics
and discern root causes of spiritual conflicts,
providing loving wisdom that reconciles and guides people so they experience
communion with Christ and conformity to Christ
as they love God (exalt God by enjoying and trusting him) and love others.

Reconciling: *"It's Horrible to Sin, but Wonderful to Be Forgiven"*

Strip Your Spiritual Friend's Enslaving Story of Death
Expose Your Spiritual Friend's Sin and God's Grace

Guiding: *"It's Supernatural to Mature"*

Strengthen Your Spiritual Friend with Christ's Empowering Story of Life
Equip and Empower Your Spiritual Friend to Love

- Soul Care: The Evils We Have Suffered
  - Sustaining: "It's Normal to Hurt"
  - Healing: "It's Possible to Hope"
- Spiritual Direction: The Sins We Have Committed
  - Reconciling: "It's Horrible to Sin, but Wonderful to Be Forgiven"
  - Guiding: "It's Supernatural to Mature"

Soul Care *and* Spiritual Direction

The tale of Jim's two counselors exposed a common problem in modern Christian counseling. We have a tendency to focus *either* on suffering *or* on sinning. We see our counselee *either* as a victim to be comforted, *or* as a sinner to be confronted. Biblical counseling is not either/or. It is both/and. "Soul care" is the term that I use to describe the biblical and historical role of coming alongside people to comfort them in their *suffering*. "Spiritual direction" refers to the role of confronting people about their *sin* and challenging them to grow in grace.

How does growth occur and for what purpose? Growth happens as we love God and others. We want to grow not simply or primarily so that we feel better. Instead, *God's glory is the goal of Christian counseling*, the reason we sustain, heal, reconcile and guide, and the purpose of growth. We grow in love for God, which exalts him as the onlooking universe sees how enjoyable he is and how worthy of our trust.

Soul Care: The Evils We Have Suffered

Offering soul care, we focus on the evils suffered by our spiritual friend. Certainly, Jim suffered despicable evil at the hands of his uncle. In counseling Jim, we want to compassionately identify with his pain and redirect him to Christ and the Body of Christ to sustain and heal his faith so he can experience communion with Christ and conformity in Christ.

The counselor acts as a conduit. Counselors build bridges from the counselee to Christ and to other Christians. Too often we view counseling as *the* answer rather than seeing counseling as a subset of discipleship—one aspect of what God uses in the sanctification process. Too often we see the counselor as *the final* hope, rather than seeing the counselor as the one who points to the Wonderful Counselor who is our hope and to the wonderful counseling that takes place as believers connect to one another in the Body of Christ.

Sustaining: "It's Normal to Hurt"

Soul care for suffering begins with sustaining. While sustaining Jim, I wanted to help him to know that "It's normal to hurt." Living in a fallen world, it's natural to grieve. That's why the Psalmists cry out to God in complaint; it's why Jeremiah pens his laments; and why Job rues the day he was born.

In talking with Jim, I sensed his story of suffering. Before I rushed in where angels dare to tread and showered him with biblical clichés, I chose to hear his story. Before interjecting God's story, I embraced his. Before insisting that God is good, I agreed with Jim that life is bad—life in our fallen world is out of joint.

I call this process *climbing in the casket*. I intend this rather macabre image to shock us into realizing the nature of sustaining. When Paul wrote his second letter to his friends in Corinth, he told them that he did not want them to be ignorant of his hardship and suffering. He wanted them to know that he was under great pressure far beyond his ability to endure, so that he despaired even of life. Indeed, in his heart he felt the sentence of death (2 Corinthians 1:3-9). Jim, too, felt like he had been handed a death sentence. His soul felt dead, disintegrated, shamed, crushed. I joined him on death row. I climbed in Jim's casket, entering his despair.

Healing: "It's Possible to Hope"

I did not intend to leave Jim there. A casket is an appropriate place to visit, but it's no place to live. While it's certainly true that life is bad, it's eternally certain that God is good. Because he is good, healing says, "It's possible to hope." Yes, we grieve, but not as those who have no hope. So while listening to Jim's sordid story of suffering with one ear, with my other ear I was listening to God's beautiful narrative of healing. He always offers beauty for ashes, gladness for mourning, and a garment of praise for our rags of despair.

It is not enough that I heard God. Jim needed to hear God. My role was to trialogue with Jim using spiritual conversations and scriptural explorations to stretch him to God's perspective. I wanted to encourage Jim to embrace God even as Paul had. Paul indicates that God allowed his suffering so that he might not rely on himself, but on God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9). I not only climbed in the casket with Jim, I also *celebrated the resurrection* with him. We raised the roof over the resurrection. Jim began to find healing when he embraced his pain, expressed his pain to God, experienced God's embrace of his pain, and found God's healing partnership, perspective, and purposes in his pain.

Spiritual Direction: The Sins We Have Committed

Some of you may be wondering, "Are we only going to talk about suffering? What about responsibility? Whatever happened to sin?" Jim and I did talk about sin. We engaged in spiritual direction: reconciling and guiding Jim in relationship to God and others.

Reconciling: "It's Horrible to Sin, but Wonderful to Be Forgiven"

While assuring Jim that he was blameless with regards to the abuse he suffered, I took Jim at his word when he shared that he knew he wasn't loving his wife and kids the way he should. Jim needed to face the sins he had committed, knowing that God is gracious even when he is sinful. As a spiritual director, I needed to understand the

spiritual dynamics and discern the root causes of Jim's failure to love so I could offer loving wisdom that could reconcile and guide Jim.

Reconciling Jim included helping him to know in a very personal way that "It's horrible to sin, but wonderful to be forgiven." The Puritans spoke of "loading the conscience with guilt" and "lightening the conscience with grace." I loaded Jim's conscience with biblical conviction about the damage that his sin was having upon God's reputation, his family's health, and his own soul. Coming to see the depth of his sin and taking personal responsibility, Jim repented of his failure to love his family.

While exposing his sin, I also exposed God's grace, because wherever sin abounds, grace superabounds. We trialogued about God as Jim's forgiving Father and Christ as his forever Friend. We pictured the Father running to Jim, throwing his arms around him, kissing him impetuously, and throwing a wild party because his son had returned home. We lightened Jim's conscience with grace.

Guiding: "It's Supernatural to Mature"

Some soul physicians are content to stop at this point, believing that the work of repentance and forgiveness completes the spiritual direction process. But Jim still had to walk into his home, face his past failures, tackle his fears, and offer his family courageous love. My task was to empower Jim to experience the truth of who he was *to* and *in* Christ so he could realize that through Christ's supernatural power he was capable of mature love. He could be a shepherd in a jungle.

We did not enter the *Twilight Zone* of confusion, but the arena of spiritual guidance. We talked about what love would look like in his home, about what risks Jim would need to take, and about how he could continue to find strength in Christ. Over time, Jim began to exercise power, love, and wisdom as a husband and father. He was not too damaged to love. In Jim's weakness, Christ showed his strength. Jim applied the truth that in Christ, "It's supernatural to mature."

Where We've Been and Where We're Heading

There are certain facts that every medical school student must know by heart. So too, soul physicians must graft into their minds the seven biblical categories of nourishing the hunger of the soul, knowing the Creator of the soul, examining the spiritual anatomy of the soul, diagnosing the fallen condition of the soul, prescribing God's cure for the soul, envisioning the final healing of the soul, and dispensing God's care for the soul.

With these seven categories, your orientation to *my* book is complete. Now it is time to crack *the Book*—the Bible. What type of book is the Book of books? How did the Author of authors compose it and why? How are we to read it and use it in soul care and spiritual direction?

Soul physicians understand the nature of the Great Physician's Book. Join me in our next two chapters as we view the old, old story from the Author's perspective. We'll learn that the Word of God is our soul physician's manual written in the form of a heroic adventure narrative ("life is a *war*") and a passionate romance novel ("life is a *wedding*").

Caring for Your Soul: Personal Applications

1. Reread the "Tale of Two Counselors" from the beginning of the chapter.

    a. Which counselor/spiritual friend do you tend to be more like? Why?

    b. Has anyone ever interacted with you like either of Jim's counselors? What did it feel like? What were the results?

2. Of nourishing the hunger of the soul, knowing the Creator of the soul, examining the spiritual anatomy of the soul, diagnosing the fallen condition of the soul, prescribing God's cure for the soul, envisioning the final healing of the soul, and dispensing God's care for the soul:

    a. Which category seems most important for you to learn more about? Why?

    b. Which concepts could you apply to your own life now? How?

3. How might your daily life change if you lived *coram Deo sola scriptura* (face-to-face with God by Scripture alone)?

4. How might your daily life be different if you lived *coram Deo sola gratia* (face-to-face with God by grace alone)?

Caring for Others: Ministry Implications

- **Develop Your Understanding of People Biblically:** Dissect my theory. Be a Berean. Examine the Word to see what God teaches about the nature of human nature. Do you have a biblical personality theory? If so, how does it guide your counseling interactions? To what degree do you think your personality theory has been impacted by secular theory? In what ways?

- **Diagnose Problems Theologically:** Commit to developing your own understanding of the fallen personality structure. Probe what constitutes relational (spiritual, social and self-aware) rational, volitional, and emotional sickness. Why do we do what we do? What is the fallen motivational structure of the human personality?

- **Prescribe Solutions Scripturally:** What are the marks of the relationally (spiritually, socially, and self-consciously), rationally, volitionally, and emotionally maturing believer? How can our inner lives increasingly reflect the inner life of Christ? What difference should our newness in Christ make in how we counsel and disciple one another? What is a biblical process of growth in grace?

- **Provide Spiritual Friendship with Grace and Truth:** Truth without grace leads to Pharisaical, legalistic, rigid, self-righteous, law-based counseling. Grace without truth leads to humanistic, lawless, self-serving, feel-good counseling. Biblical counselors integrate truth and grace by sharing the Scripture and their own souls. They explore grace narratives that highlight God's truth perspective, and they offer grace relationships that emulate Christ's style of relating. Which do you tend toward most: grace or truth? Why? How could you better balance, better integrate, these two essential counseling components?

- **Follow a Biblical Treatment Plan:** Whether it is "sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding," or some other model/approach, we all need some map or guide for interacting with people. What is yours? Are you consciously aware of it? Where did you learn it? How does it assist you? Is it biblical? Historical?