Gospel Conversations

Foreword

By Pastor Brian Croft

No one was more surprised than I was to be asked to run the newest center on Church revitalization at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Besides the fact that there are many gifted and qualified people affiliated with this institution, I personally have no formal theological training or degrees. So, why me? They explained how crucial it was that the vision for this new center be driven by the practical, daily trench work of church revitalization that I knew well, not just a theoretical approach. They understood that to reach pastors in the trenches and to train students for this important work, they needed practitioners. They needed real pastors who had done this hard work in declining, struggling churches and have survived to tell about it to be the teachers, trainers, and motivators. In light of this, I gladly accepted.

There is an essential lesson that must be learned from this to be truly effective in all local church ministry: the theoretical must move to the practical. Faithful preaching must lead to piercing application. The truths of the gospel must permeate the deeper places of the heart in a raw and honest way. Otherwise, those truths become a mental exercise that stay on the surface of the soul and only bring an illusion of change without true healing.

This is especially true with the ministry of soul care. To treat the deep brokenness of the soul with heady theories and spirited debates is like a heart surgeon thinking a successful heart transplant has been accomplished by merely trimming a scab off one’s chest. The soul must be reached to do effective soul care. Since the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that gives us hope, healing, and life to our souls, the gospel must infiltrate the soul for true lasting healing to come in the midst of the layers of pain, scars, and hurt that each of us lug around in the crevasses of our souls. This cannot be done without a knowledgeable guide who is also a skillful practitioner—someone who has a strong grasp on the saving power of the gospel yet knows the interworking of the soul to know how to reach its depths with that gospel and help others do the same in a real, authentic way.

The book you hold in your hand uniquely does both. Bob Kellemen is over-qualified to teach and lecture on all facets of biblical counseling, evidenced not just in the myriads of letters at the end of his name, but in the respect and reputation he has earned among his academic colleagues and fellow biblical counselors. But more importantly, Bob has a unique gift to take the truths of the gospel he knows so well, and skillfully move them to the heart and help others do the same.

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Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ is one of the finest demonstrations of that skillful movement I have ever read. It is a practical, well-balanced, and an incredibly useful tool that will press others to be real, raw, and honest in the safety of Christian community, which is essential to get to those deeper places in our souls.

One word of counsel: Bob understands the best way to learn how to care for souls is by doing it and allowing others to do the same for you. Do not settle into this book as a distant reader with your heart on the shelf. Bob will not allow it. He wants and even expects you to participate and have your own soul nourished, challenged, and met by the sweet, real, and forgiving presence of Jesus.

This book is all you will need to guide and train others to minister the gospel to the soul. But if you will take the risk of engaging in this book with your own soul as intended, I am confident you will not only more fully learn how to help others care for souls, but you will also experience the healing balm of the gospel for your own soul in a new and fresh way.

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