

The book cover features a light cream background with a horizontal band of teal and a darker teal base. Two thick, textured gold brushstrokes, resembling cracked paint or gold leaf, run diagonally across the cover. The author's name is in the top right, and the title is in the center. The subtitle is in the bottom right.

T. Dale
Johnson Jr.

The Church as a Culture of Care

Finding Hope in
Biblical Community

“In this excellent work, Dr. Dale Johnson reestablishes both the care and the competency of what Jesus Christ intended for the church in discipling and counseling the deeper hurts and sinful failings of the soul. This book is a must-read for any Christian who desires to disciple and counsel others, especially pastors, elders, and church leaders. It is a gold mine of insight!”

John D. Street, Chair, Graduate Department of Biblical Counseling,
The Master’s University & Seminary

“Dale Johnson is a gift to the church, as is this book. I highly recommend it for all who strive for a richer understanding of local church ministry and all who are committed to biblical approaches to pastoral care and Christian community.”

Jason K. Allen, President, Midwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary & Spurgeon College

“This book is a positive and biblical encouragement for local churches to fulfill their privilege and responsibility to serve struggling men and women with truth from God’s sufficient Word. Readers will see Christ exalted as his church is given the position of prominence in soul-care that his precious blood purchased for our good and his glory.”

Steve Viars, Faith Church and Biblical Counseling Ministry,
Lafayette, IN

“With a pastor’s heart and clear biblical teaching, Dale Johnson clarifies the characteristics of a church that does soul care well. Pastors will find this book essential for fine-tuning their own vision, useful for leadership training, and helpful for Sunday school classes and small group discussions.”

Jim Berg, ACBC and ABC Certified Biblical Counselor; council member, Biblical Counseling Coalition; professor of biblical counseling, Bob Jones University Seminary; author of *Changed into His Image* and *Quieting a Noisy Soul*; founder of Freedom That Lasts

“Johnson has met a true need with this book and very appropriately issues a clarion call for a more excellent way to care for one another within the church. A scholar and former pastor himself, he has a clear passion to encourage leaders within the church to build a culture of care consistent with Jesus and his Word, for his glory and the sake of his body, the church.”

Stuart W. Scott, Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Master’s University, Santa Clarita, CA; director of membership services, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC)

“Dale Johnson presents God’s design and intention for the church as the context for real nurture and growth through biblical care and counseling. This volume is a treasure chest full of ecclesiological wisdom conveyed in practical instruction for both leaders and laity. I’ll be asking our whole church body to read and apply it!”

Rick Holland, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, KS

“As God’s household, the church of Jesus Christ is the pillar and foundation of God’s truth, yet the modern church has neglected its role to biblically counsel its members. Against this backdrop, Dale Johnson asserts a simple, timely, compelling claim: God has called the church to be a culture of care. Gratefully, Johnson captures the Bible’s vision and provides direction for how church leaders and church members should fulfill it.”

Robert D. Jones, Biblical Counseling Professor, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author of *Pursuing Peace*, *Uprooting Anger*, and coauthor of *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*

“Dale Johnson writes a timely and needed primer on the role of the church in the care of souls. This reminder comes with gentle exhortations, informed critiques, and humble clarifications. Moreover, it provides a biblically informed call to action for the church of Jesus Christ. As a pastor and a missionary, I am thrilled for this much-needed resource to be in the hands of church members, pastors, and seminarians.”

Juan F. Moncayo, Senior Pastor, Iglesia La Fuente, Quito, Ecuador

“This book makes the brilliant move to aim at the whole culture of a church—its shared beliefs and values, which will shape its practices far more effectively than any policy change ever could. Care should seem normal in the church because it is at the heart of Jesus’s ministry.”

Jeremy Pierre, Lawrence & Charlotte Hoover Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author of *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*

“‘The church is God’s agent to care for the souls of his people.’ That’s a game-changer statement that needs to impact the church. Dale has done a great job writing about a much-needed topic in a clear, biblical, loving, and accurate way. With clear and key definitions, examples, and essential theological concepts for every believer, this is a must-read for every believer to know and be challenged to obey God’s Word to care for one another.

Kike Torres, Lead Pastor, Horizonte, Queretaro, Mexico; ACBC Certified member; president of the Biblical Counseling Coalition Mexico; author of *A New Life*

“The church is the arena in which we enjoy the love of God triune. One of the chief ways we express and experience this love is in caring for one another. In this volume, Dr. Dale Johnson provides a timely reminder of this truth, along with an insightful analysis of what it means for the church to cultivate a culture of care. Here is a rich resource for all believers, whether they be in the pulpit or the pew.”

J. Stephen Yuille, Vice President of Academics, Heritage College & Seminary; associate professor of Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Church as a Culture of Care

Finding Hope in Biblical
Community

T. DALE JOHNSON JR.



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To my parents, Tommy Dale and Nancy Johnson,
who taught me to fear the Lord and love others,
especially those who are of the household of faith.

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Introduction

Many years ago, as a sophomore in college, I decided to major in psychology. I believed that God was calling me to serve in pastoral ministry, and I thought studying psychology would help me understand how to help people. But even as a young Christian, I had many reservations about my psychology courses. The theories of Freud, Rogers, and others seemed inconsistent with a biblical understanding of people and their problems. At the same time psychology was intriguing, even fascinating, to study. I remember thinking things like *oh, so that's why we act like that*, or *this is why my family does things that way*. The study of psychology was beginning to shape my foundational thinking about humanity, but I struggled to square it with what the Bible clearly taught to be true about people.

During this time, I had a casual lunch meeting with a local pastor. I had not intended to discuss my concerns with him, but we ended spending most of our time talking about the psychology courses I was taking. He began to shed light on my experience by explaining how the underlying ideology and primary tenets of modern psychology were in direct competition with Scripture. He recommended that I read an author named Jay Adams and said that he would be a refreshing voice to a young man like me who wanted to know and understand how to help people from a biblical perspective.

I took his advice and started to read everything that Adams—who most would call the father of biblical counseling—had written. It was like having a light bulb come on in my head as he defended the place of soul care in the church and the primacy of Scripture in that care. His work articulated many of the concerns I had and also gave me a road map for a truly Christian counseling ministry under the authority of the church, dependent upon the Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Adams once said that a definitive work or two needed to be written on the role of the church in soul care and counseling. This book is my attempt to respond to the need Dr. Adams recognized, but it is in no way an attempt to write something “definitive.” I am sure after reading you will agree that more needs to be done. However, my goal is to help Christians begin to recover the necessity of the church for soul care. I hope this book will encourage healthy discussion that will allow the church, and the Scripture entrusted to her, to be central to the conversation regarding soul care.

Another reason I am writing this book is that Christians who have sought to integrate the Bible with secular psychology have often claimed that the Bible does not offer specific techniques or methods for the counseling task and is, therefore, insufficient. Their approach to soul care attempts to blend secular psychology with theology. Their argument is that the Bible does not speak about the modern problems described by mental health and psychiatry. While they are careful not to dismiss the Bible’s usefulness in total, they say it is only sufficient and authoritative for a small section of people’s needs that are *spiritual*. They argue that psychology is given to us by means of common grace or general revelation and is authoritative and sufficient to address the broadening psychological aspects of humanity. They point

out that the Bible is not a scientific textbook, doesn't have comprehensive or exhaustive information about humankind, and does not provide a methodology for counseling.

While I agree the Bible is not intended to be a "textbook" in the style we think of such resources today, their perspective dismisses the validity of God's purpose for the church and the God-given functions of the church for the task of soul care. My goal is to help us unpack the way God has equipped his people for every function of the church as an integral part of the care of souls. God has provided the church with the necessary resources and design for us to care well for one another with the Word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we are led by Christ.

The Bible does not provide the kind of methodological approach to soul care that appeases behavioral scientists, because the Bible reveals a different perspective on people and their struggles than the popular therapeutic philosophies. They claim the Bible is insufficient for soul care because it is not an exhaustive resource. But if we are to measure counseling psychologies and mental health by that same standard—the need to have exhaustive information in order to be useful—then we will not find sufficient help there either. The Bible does, however, present a comprehensive approach to soul care where Jesus is at the center of restoration (although he will never fit neatly within the paradigm of counseling psychologies). It's that biblical approach to soul care that we will begin to explore in this book.

A third purpose of the book is to challenge the current narrative which dismisses the church as an antiquated or unprepared institution for the care of souls. Many claim that prayer is too simplistic, the Word of God too antiquated, and the Holy Spirit insufficient to help the broken and the needy. But Christians too easily dismiss God's supernatural

resources and his church as a vital means of God's intended care for disquieted souls. The dismissal of these resources graciously provided to us by our all-sufficient God leaves us dependent upon the insufficient and ever-shifting shadows of earthly wisdom. It has always been difficult for me to understand how many who claim that God's resources are insufficient are willing to put so much trust and faith in human resources like modern psychology—a subjective, limited, constantly changing, and nonexhaustive explanation for human problems.

I realize that churches are full of sinners, who can and do sin against each other. Far too many churches have a culture that has harbored or hidden the carnage of sin, instead of being a haven of restoration from sin's destruction. But that doesn't mean we should dismiss the necessity of the church. Instead, we need to repent and return to the purposes and design God established in order to see true restoration.

This book is intended to be an admission of our failures and an exhortation to arise and reclaim the church as a culture of care. Interwoven in the discussion will be critiques on ideas that have hindered the church, admissions of our abdications in deference to the cultural tides of care, and a call to reconsider the beauty and intention of God's church as the institution responsible to restore the brokenhearted back to the fullness of life abundant in Christ, who restores the soul.

My hope and prayer is that this book is one of the means God uses to spur churches and their leaders to grow more faithful in living out their call to provide care for souls. The church is best positioned and equipped to bear the burden of soul care. God has not given any other institution the responsibility to minister to the problems of life. Every counseling system attempts to offer a worldview to

answer meaningful human questions. If we believe in the authority and sufficiency of God's Word, we are convinced that the Christian worldview provides the true foundation and clearest lens for us to understand the problems of the human soul.

So many of the troubles we face in life are vexations of the soul as we wrestle with the realities of our own mortality, purpose, meaning, and value. God has given his church the responsibility to steward souls by providing context for our human experiences and hope for true restoration in Christ. The Bible explains our human experiences better than any human wisdom. May we be found faithful to love as Christ, shepherd as Christ, care as Christ, and mend the brokenhearted as Christ, to the praise of his glory.

CHAPTER ONE

Whose Job Is Soul Care?

Suppose a young man—let’s call him Sam—came to you because his life had disintegrated. He described a series of sad events that had left him desperate. His wife Aisha had left him, taking Jerome, their baby boy, with her. He had lost his job. He felt all alone in the world and passed his time playing video games and drinking too much. You know he needs help, but who can help? Are his problems relational? Is his drinking an addiction with a physical basis? Why can’t he hold down a job? Of course, it’s possible that he should see a medical doctor, maybe a lawyer, or even someone to help him find another job, but where should he start?

Start with the Church

God’s Word tells us to start with his church. That’s what this book is about—reclaiming the church as God’s agent to care for the souls of his people—people like Sam and Aisha. The Scripture paints a picture of the world as full of consistently desperate and broken people, who are in constant need of and dependent upon God’s care. The New Testament traces for us how the early church cared for those whose lives were overcome with grief, lust, anger, selfish ambition, and a host of other problems. Some troubles were caused by personal sin, and others by suffering in a world cursed

by sin. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul consistently reminded believers of the benefits of God's Word, the fellowship of the saints, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as means of comfort and correction to the weary, wounded, or wayward soul (2 Corinthians 1:37; 1 Thessalonians 4:18).

From its inception, the church has been a constant, although never perfect, haven for the downcast and hurting. For centuries, the church was the first place that people would turn for help with their inner anguish. Gregory the Great's *The Book of Pastoral Rule* encouraged a focus on shepherding and tender care for church leaders in the sixth century. A book compiled by Theodore Tappert, *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, catalogs several of the constant inquiries Martin Luther received for spiritual counsel and his attempts at biblical soul care. Luther's student Martin Bucer wrote the well-known work *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, in which Bucer used Ezekiel 34 as a model of pastoral care. He assumed that the responsibility of care was the burden of the church carried primarily by pastors. The Puritans certainly added to the notion that the church, particularly her leaders, were responsible to shepherd the flock of God through their soulish vexations. This is how pastors became known as physicians of the soul.

But today the church is not usually the first place, or even the second place, people turn to for help with their troubles. Sometimes the church is viewed so negatively that it's not even the last resort. As Jerry Bridges remarked, "There is a crisis of caring in the Church of Jesus Christ today."¹ There are a variety of reasons for this, including broader cultural shifts and the fact that the church has not always been a good steward of its responsibility to provide soul care. Often we in the church have ostracized sinners and added to the burdens of sufferers. And yet, God has called the

church and equipped her with sufficient resources to care for the sinner and sufferer alike. For these failures, both past and present, we must repent of our blindness and our neglect toward caring for others the way God intended—as his hands and feet.

We also must consider how entrenched modern culture’s assumption is that secular, professionalized counseling provides the template by which all counseling approaches should be measured. The modern secular paradigm has become so dominant that it has often clouded the minds of believers to the vitality of the Scripture and the design of God’s church for the ministry of soul care. Many modern Christians view the paradigm of counseling and soul care from a secular perspective, and dismiss the Bible because it does not seem to have an equivalent structure, methods, or techniques that fit the mold of secular counseling models. So, some Christians have neglected the Scriptures altogether for soul care—giving that essential church function to secular professionals. Other Christians, who don’t want to throw the Scripture away entirely, have worked to incorporate the Bible within established secular systems of care. This school of thought, which we will call “integrationism,” often has good intentions, but does not see the primacy of the Bible for soul care. An unintended consequence is the continued professionalism of soul care, the neglect of the Scripture, and the marginalization of the church’s role to care for souls.

A Definition of Biblical Counseling and Purpose

Unlike secular counseling, biblical counseling doesn’t stand alone. The very name “biblical counseling” points to the truth that, at its core, biblical counseling has no grounding without the Scripture and no authority outside of the church

of Jesus Christ. God has given his church the responsibility and calling to minister the Scripture so the broken can be healed and the lost saved. To do the personal ministry work of biblical counseling is to do the mission and ministry of the church.

How do we faithfully respond to God's call and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, renew the church as a culture of care?

Let's begin by defining biblical counseling. Biblical counseling, as a modern movement, began more than fifty years ago with the publication of Jay Adams's seminal work, *Competent to Counsel*.² Since then, the biblical counseling movement has continued to grow and is now in its third generation.³ With the growth of any movement, it is always helpful to revisit key tenets. Dr. Samuel Stephens, my colleague at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and I co-wrote the following definition to offer a starting point for understanding biblical counseling's foundations, parameters, and goals:

Biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God's people to others under the oversight of God's church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God's Word through the work of the Holy Spirit. Biblical counseling seeks to reorient disordered desires, affections, thoughts, behaviors, and worship toward a God-designed anthropology in an effort to restore people to a right fellowship with God and others. This is accomplished by speaking the truth in love and applying Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance, thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Stephens and I plan to write a series of works in the future that explore the different elements of the definition above. This book will touch on several aspects of this definition, but its primary purpose is to explain the importance of the clause “under the oversight of God’s church,” and to present a theologically grounded vision of the church as a culture of care.

The Church Is Responsible for the Care of Souls

Who is responsible for the care of souls? There are a wide variety of approaches to answering this question. We might try to identify who we believe does soul care *best*. We may answer based on our experiences, and then decide who should be responsible from the data we gather. While this approach may yield valuable insights, it should not be how we, as Christians, engage such a question.

As Christians, our priorities demand that we consider the question from the position of Scripture first. Has God granted one of his ordained institutions the authority and responsibility to provide soul care? As John MacArthur said, “A truly *Christian* worldview . . . is one in which the Word of God, rightly understood, is firmly established as both the foundation and the final authority for everything we hold true.”²⁴ Those who do not believe the Bible is God’s revelation will certainly have a different approach to answering this question. Understandably, they begin with a variety of presuppositions that help them create meaning from observable data in the world. For Christians, however, the Scriptures must be the lens through which we see the world. The Bible is not the only place where Christians should seek information, but it must be the first place we go to understand the data we observe and the last place

we go to make sense of it in God's world. Otherwise, the data we observe will be ordered in earthly terms and constructs which will cloud our understanding of people and their problems in God's world and ultimately send us in the wrong direction to find solutions.

God-Ordained Institutions

Who has been given the responsibility to carry God's message of care and restoration? Who has God given the responsibility to demonstrate the care of Christ for the broken? Who is to be the hands and feet of the Lord Jesus to bind up the brokenhearted?

We will begin this part of the discussion within the context of the doctrine of jurisdiction. The doctrine of jurisdiction—or as some have called it, “sphere sovereignty”—simply acknowledges that God in his infinite wisdom has established legitimate earthly authorities for his glory and our good.⁵ Setting this parameter assumes that God is sovereign, and that he has ordained certain institutions with responsibilities in the social order. Most of the time this discussion is scaled down to speak of these institutions in terms of civil authorities (state), family, and church.⁶

Self-governance is an important truth—we will all, individually, be held accountable to God for our thoughts and deeds (Romans 14:10–12). Yet, there is a danger in limiting our view only to individual accountability. Instead, we need to see that all of life is under God's jurisdiction and that therefore we will be held to account by him for the way we act toward others and toward his established institutions. Francis Schaeffer said, “the Lordship of Christ covers all of life and all of life equally. It is not only that true spirituality covers all of life, but it covers all parts of the spectrum of

life equally. In this sense there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual.”⁷ In contrast to our culture which encourages individual choice based on our own thoughts, feelings, and desires, it is important to note that we honor the Lord by our submission to legitimate authorities.

The authority given to these distinct entities is a stewardship with roles and responsibilities. Each of God’s ordained institutions will give an account for how their God-given responsibilities are stewarded for his name and for his purposes. The authority granted is only delegated and is not ultimate—God is the only sovereign.

Government

Ruling authorities bear a solemn and civil duty for which they will give an account to God. It is always important to keep the authority of the government within proper perspective. “God has ordained the state as a delegated authority,” Schaeffer said, “it is not autonomous.”⁸ God is sovereign and this is his world. He reigns over all things and all things are subject to him. God entrusts the government with a certain role and responsibility to steward within the social order. We acknowledge that this is a good thing, and as Christians we are commanded to obey the ruling authorities. By that obedience, we honor God (Romans 13).

As with every human institution, governing authorities are not always righteous and, at times, are difficult to obey. As believers, however, we are called to pray for the ones who lead. We are called to obey unless they require compliance against the commands of God. The ruling authorities—whether we call them kings, governors, or presidents—are appointed by God. Whether the process be democratic or not, it is God’s sovereign hand which oversees the ascendancy to those positions of power (Daniel

2:21). God may use some rulers as a blessing to his people, and he may use some to discipline or judge. As believers, we must remain steadfast in our obedience to God in the way we obey the ruling authorities, knowing that God will hold them accountable for their stewardship of authority—whether good or evil (1 Peter 2:13–23).

Of course, this does not mean that we are called to blindly obey ruling authorities. Schaeffer again reminds us, “If there is no place for civil disobedience, then the government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the Living God.”⁹ For those who trust in Jesus, God is our highest authority. His commands are not to be compromised. If an earthly ruler, being evil, requires us to breach a command of God or our clear conscience to obey him as sovereign, then we must be courageous to disobey and say as Peter did, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

That does not mean we have a license to disobey the government at any point that we simply disagree. Rather in those cases, our disagreements with the acts of government should drive us to our knees to pray for those who have authority over us. We are to pray for them so that we can live quiet and peaceable lives and for the sake of gospel proclamation (1 Timothy 2:2–3).

The primary point I want to make here is that the government is not responsible for the care of souls. They have a purpose in God’s world, and we are to pray for our governing officials. We are to comply with governing authorities when they are not requiring us to disobey God. The reason I make this distinction is that many Christians live as if the government, by regulation and licensing of individuals who practice counseling, is primarily responsible for the domain

of soul care. Yet, that is not the primary role given for which our governing officials will give an account to God.

Church

In the same way that it is not the government's responsibility to oversee the care of souls, it is not the church's responsibility to punish through incarceration or other physical means those who do evil. The church is not responsible to be God's "avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer"; that is the role of the governing authorities that "have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1–4). The church is responsible, however, for the care of souls. In most every function of the church described in Scripture, the care of souls is a primary aim (Galatians 6:1–2; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; James 5:13–16).

The biblical counseling movement has consistently given responsibility to the church as the God-ordained institution to offer his care to the broken. God has entrusted his means of grace through the Word and the Spirit in the work of the church to heal the brokenhearted (Ezekiel 34:16ff). As the statement from the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors says, the church "is the main agent for all ministry of the Word, including the ministry of counseling and discipleship."¹⁰

This has been biblical counseling's focus from its inception. "Counseling is the work of the Holy Spirit," Adams said. "Effective counseling," he continued, "cannot be done apart from him."¹¹ In more definitive terms Adams said, "The authority for counseling is granted through Christ's Church."¹² David Powlison agreed: "Biblical-nouthetic counseling was initiated to provide two things: a cogent critique of secularism and a distinctly biblical alternative." Powlison provided further clarification by adding, "Biblical

counseling operates within the worldview of the Bible, with Bible in hand. It is centered on God even (especially!) when it thinks about man. It is centered on Jesus Christ, who became a man in order to save us. It is centered in the midst of Christ's people who are called to pray for one another and to counsel one another in love."¹³ Heath Lambert, a third-generation biblical counselor, reiterated that foundational presupposition when he began his theology book with the statement, "Counseling is a theological discipline."¹⁴ He added, "If counseling is grounded in our understanding of the truth, and the truth is rightly upheld in the context of the church, then counseling finds a real home in the church."¹⁵

It makes sense that those who don't believe in the authority of Scripture would question and argue against this perspective. As Christians, we clearly possess distinct beliefs about the realities of life. But these should not be controversial statements when a person believes basic Christian doctrines. From a Christian worldview, counseling is a theological discipline based upon the Word of God and the work of the Spirit of God. Biblical counseling is centered upon Jesus's finished work which enables us to change from the inside out, love one another, and walk in peace amid the chaos caused by sin and suffering. If that is the case, then it seems reasonable to say that the church is the institution God has made responsible for the care of souls.

While primary streams of the biblical counseling movement have remained consistent in their declaration of the church's responsibility for soul care, they are only a supporting opinion. The real question is, what does God's Word say about the burden of responsibility for the care of souls? The answer to that question provides our starting point for how we build a system of soul care.

The Church Responsible

As has been clearly articulated by several, the church in the modern world is experiencing a crisis of direction.¹⁶ The church seems to consistently wrestle with how to be relevant for a modern audience. While much has been written on this subject, often the discussions tend to center around various functions of the church. These are important discussions, but many begin with pragmatic assumptions—as if the church is free to operate any way we choose to accomplish the purposes we want. Even when we have good and godly end goals, this pragmatic approach proves detrimental in accomplishing God’s purposes for the church. We could address the many ways this has negatively affected the church, but for our purposes, I would like us to consider the detriment that has occurred to our practice of soul care.

The Bible teaches that the church is responsible to God to steward the duties and authority he has given to us. The church, with Christ as its head, has been granted authority in the sphere of the human soul, by which to redeem, restore, heal, cleanse, and grow in purity—in a nutshell, to care for souls. We can see how God cares for the souls of his people all through the Bible, beginning with his gracious care for Adam and Eve in the garden. His care can be seen in the favor Noah found, in the deliverance secured in Moses, and the blessing of Abraham. We can see God’s care in the promised Messiah, who would come as the Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor of Isaiah 9:6, and the Great Shepherd who would heal the brokenhearted in Ezekiel 34:11–16. God is the one who cares, and a primary aim of the Old Testament is that care would come to fruition in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus demonstrated this care toward the sinners he encountered and in his death for sinners like us. The words

of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, provide a sense of his commission to the church to care for the broken. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). Discipleship is God’s primary means of restoring his people because discipleship is the intentional pursuit of becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

In the name of Jesus, salvation is found, sins are forgiven, hearts are made new, the wounded and broken are healed, we are changed into his image, and humanity is made whole. The work of the church is to care for souls in clear proclamation of the name and gospel of Jesus. No other entity can accomplish the work God requires of his church, by his Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the balm in Gilead to heal the wounded soul and the true bread of heaven to sustain us.

Every aspect of the work of the church is intended to care for souls. Preaching, shepherding, one-anothering, church discipline, missionary proclamation, personal obedience—all are intended to awaken or strengthen the soul to live faithfully and peacefully in a war-torn and sin-cursed world. If Jesus cared for others by the truth of God’s Word in these various ways, shouldn’t the church under his headship do the same without reservation?

We can see our responsibility as a church in the tasks given to leaders to keep watch over our souls (Hebrews 13:17). The call of the “one anothers” in the New Testament is another clear evidence that the church, under the headship of Christ, is to care for souls by making everyone complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28). In the chapters that follow I will offer key passages from Scripture, identify cultural influences to avoid, and then present critical facets of

the church as God's primary means of applying Christ as the one who cares for and restores the souls of humanity.

Before we embark on a close examination of why and how the church has failed to care for souls, the next chapter will present a positive vision of what it looks like for a church to have a "culture of care." This is not meant to be a cookie-cutter formula that can be used to replicate a culture of care in your church. Rather, it is meant to bring clarity to the characteristics of a church that does soul care well and to serve as a challenge to revisit God's design of the church and her functions as his method of caring for all of our human weaknesses.

Discussion Questions

1. How does this chapter challenge or change the way you think about the church's role in "soul care"?
2. What roadblocks do you see in your own church to becoming the primary way that souls are cared for? What would you have to change? What are you already doing to care for souls?
3. If Sam came to your church for help, what would he find? Does your pastor have the primary responsibility for helping Sam? What (or who) else might be helpful to him?