

## Taking Care of My Soul—Taking Care of the Souls of Others

By Bob Young

I would like to tell you that something as simple as “soul care” was automatic for me, that when I became a Christian I immediately understood it and started to work on the project of soul development. Unfortunately, something nearer the opposite pole is true.

Stephen W. Smith recently wrote a booklet focused on personal spiritual formation (*Soul Care*). He observes in the introduction to the booklet,

"Soul care isn't a cookie-cutter process. God makes each human as a unique individual. We discover satisfaction as we shape our spiritual practices in ways that nourish and restore our individual souls. Then we can reemerge into the world to passionately pursue our calling, as we love and support others on their paths."

As I look back to my early years as a Christian, I realize that God awakened in me a spiritual hunger and gave me new spiritual life when I was baptized into Christ, but I knew little about nourishing my inner spirit except “read the Bible and pray.” I did not receive instructions about how to read the Bible or how to pray. In fact, when I became a Christian, no one told me that I was supposed to take care of my own soul. I do not know who I thought would tend my soul—perhaps I thought “soul growth” would just happen automatically by going to church, Bible classes, and devotionals. I remember some high points in my spiritual journey through the years as I completed my undergraduate Bible degree, began my life’s work in ministry, and attended graduate school, but it was not until a number of years later than it really became apparent to me that my own soul needed careful attention.

The early years of my ministry were largely devoted to winning others and nurturing them in the faith. My task was to nurture and feed both older and newer Christians. I felt my “soul hunger” when I read books about the spiritual disciplines and personal relationship with God, but it is now incredible to me that even when I was tired and near spiritual exhaustion, it did not occur to me that my own soul needed intensive care.

When I served at Ohio Valley University, I helped institute a new general education course open to all students; the course was titled Personal Spiritual Development. Bible majors were strongly encouraged (but not required) to take the course. After I saw the rewards personal spiritual attention yielded, I wanted everyone I knew to share the same spiritual benefit.

I hope you have heard someone somewhere at some time say these things.

→To every Christian, you are responsible for nurturing your own soul.

→To parents, you are responsible for the soul care of your children and for helping them to develop soul care abilities.

→To preachers and elders, do not neglect to remind your people how important soul care is; help them accept responsibility for their own souls and learn effective ways to tend their souls.

→Teachers, you can help your students by encouraging them to learn soul care and soul growth.