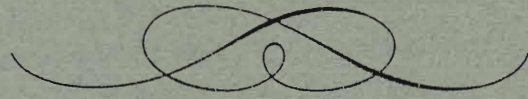
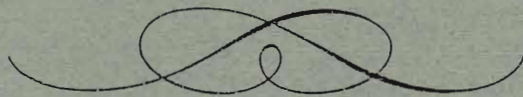


DR. LARRY CRABB



FINDING

GOOD



MILES J. STANFORD

DR. LARRY CRABB

FINDING GOD -- Dr. Larry Crabb's eighth book is titled Finding God (Zondervan, 1993, 217 pages).

DR. LARRY CRABB, JR. -- Dr. Crabb is founder and director of the Institute of Biblical Counseling, "a ministry committed to training Christians to resolve life's problems biblically and to help others in the context of Christian community." In addition to conducting IBC seminars across the country, Dr. Crabb is professor in the Department of Biblical Counseling at Colorado Christian University, in Lakewood, Colorado.

The author earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Illinois in 1970. He practiced psychology for ten years, and for seven years (1982-1989) directed the master's program in biblical counseling at Grace Theological Seminary, in Winona Lake, Indiana.

TESTIMONY OF TRAUMA -- This book consists of Dr. Crabb's near-total baring of his emotionally and spiritually ill soul. The author is not to be blamed for the condition of his life and ministry, but rather to be pitied and prayed for. There is a very definite reason for this candid and devastating confession and revelation, which will be explained later in this critique.

DRS. DAVIS AND WHITCOMB, RE THE CRABB MINISTRY -- In the following pages we will see just why Drs. Davis and Whitcomb made the following statements concerning Dr. Crabb's seven-year tenure at Grace Theological Seminary. Two weeks after being dismissed from 38 years on the faculty of Grace, in early February of 1990, Dr. Whitcomb wrote an eight-page letter to the Seminary Trustees, seeking reinstatement:

Dr. Davis has in some cases stood with me. This was particularly true of the damaging impact of the Biblical Counseling Program, under Dr. Larry Crabb and his team, upon many of our students and professors since 1982, and even broken relationships between children and parents.

Dr. Davis stated that "the Seminary will never recover from the negative aspects of the Crabb program." In the opinion of qualified observers at the Seminary, "Dr. Crabb's teachings have done more to damage our school than any single influence in our history."

So much for the start; but wait until the end! In the meantime, one wonders how Dr. Crabb remains on the faculty of Colorado Christian University. Possibly the reading of this book will solve the problem. It is to be kept in mind that its contents span early 1991 to early 1993.

THE UNKNOWN GOD -- On March 3, 1991, a United Airlines 737 bound for the airport in Colorado Springs crashed nose-first into a neighborhood park, killing all 25 people aboard. Dr. Crabb's older brother, William, was on the plane. Dr. Crabb shares his revealing experience of two weeks later:

During the day on Sunday, March 17, I felt restless, uneasy. That night, I couldn't sleep. At midnight, I slipped out of bed, reached for my Bible, and headed for the privacy of my study.

For reasons still unclear, within seconds of my sitting down the dam burst. Tears gushed from my eyes and poured down my face. I sobbed, I wailed, I heaved for perhaps twenty minutes, without one recognizable word coming from my mouth, just the groaning of a soul in wrenching pain. I felt an unspeakable sorrow beyond any I had ever known. With terrible clarity, I realized that I, along with everyone else, was out of the Garden of Eden and had no way back in.

And then words began to come, out loud, subdued at first, then with the intensity of a scream. I cried to the Lord, "I cannot endure what I know to be true. Life is painful. I am selfish. Everything is intolerable. Nothing satisfies. Nothing brings relief. Nothing good is certain. There is no rest. Sorrow outweighs joy. I cannot go on without knowing you better!"

Then, as suddenly as they began, the tears stopped. I sat quietly, aware that I was doing business with God, that my deepest being was engaged with him. He must be pleased, I thought, with my zealous longing for communion with him.

I felt good for about a minute. And then, with the impact of a battering ram, the realization hit me: "I am preoccupied with me! I'm not even close to touching God. He's not on my mind; I am!" The tears flowed again, this time with even greater violence.

I cried out, "God, I don't know how to come to you. I need to know you, to sense your presence, to feel your love [emphasis ours] more than anything else. But I don't know what to do. Every path I follow leads back to me. I must find the way to you! I know you're all I have. But I don't know you well enough for you to be all I need [emphasis his]. Please let me find you" (pp. 24, 25).

PAINFUL PAUCITY --

Despite our best efforts, life never gets quite good enough. Our standards are never met. With pain beyond tears, we feel how badly we want to taste Christ, how desperately we long for God to let us find him. And with longing beyond words, we groan with the intensity of our desire to know him, now lying on the ground face down, prostrate beneath the cold sky, afraid to look up, one moment hoping that God will leave us alone in our misery rather than destroy us with his presence, and the next hoping against hope that he will reveal a heart of merciful love. The moments pass, sometimes months and years.

More than once I have risen from bed at 2 a.m., unable to lie still because of anger-filled and terrifying thoughts. I break out into a cold sweat. A strange dread descends that seems to have its source in more than the responsibilities I must face. Life seems too big for me. I am not up to its demands. I feel furious at whoever requires something of me. Why won't someone understand and give me a break?

One morning several months ago, after tossing about with thoughts like these, I stood at the foot of my bed, unable to move for perhaps ten minutes. Finally, a leg moved me back to bed. I stayed there for an hour, unable to sleep. "God, where are you? What are you supposed to be doing? Can't you see I'm desperate? What good are you?" [emphasis his]. I heard no answer. Eventually, from sheer exhaustion, I fell asleep immobilized, wanting with all my heart to hear from God.

UNMITIGATED MESS --

As I reflect on my life today, nearly a year after the plane crash, I conclude that my prayer for maturity has not been answered as I had wished, no more than my prayer for the safety of family members was answered on that terrible day last March. In spite of passionate pleas for maturity, I'm still a mess. If I have a new glow about me, I rarely see it. And when I do think I catch a glimpse, it quickly fades.

I'm still too irritable. The slightest provocation can send a wave of fury through me which delights in destroying whatever lies in its path. At times, I'm as thin-skinned as a spoiled child. If my wife, Rachael, criticizes something I do or fails to respond to my moods supportively, a pettiness, both deliciously powerful and repulsively immature, sometimes rises within me. Have I changed? I reacted the same way a quarter of a century ago when we first married.

Unholy desires still burn within me. Middle age is not refining my appetites. Other feelings, some good, some bad--come and go, seemingly at their own whim. For no reason, I sometimes plummet into a loneliness that swallows every trace of joy, and weakens my essential passion for people and things.

For years, I have lived through seasons of self-hatred when I feel unwanted and unwanted. This self-loathing feels like a poisoned apple: Observe me from a distance and you will think me desirable. Get close enough to handle me and I still look good. Bite into me and you'll be harmed, perhaps destroyed. These poisonous feelings severely distort my thinking, drain me of productive energy, and shut me up in the perverse joys of sulking.

I sometimes lose the vision for what God wants to do through my life. When that happens, I either panic or feel lifelessly indifferent. When I panic, I accept too many opportunities for ministry, preferring the possibility of burnout to the risk of being shelved. When apathy sets in, I feel put upon by people who want to exploit my gifts but care nothing for me.

Am I improving? Or getting worse? Has my fervent pursuit of God moved me along the path that leads to enjoyable fellowship with Christ? Or am I on the wrong path? Or standing still?

But honest scrutiny of my life still reveals much lacking. I long to be what I am not, to feel what I rarely feel, to love as I have never loved. Too often, I feel weak, empty, frenzied, lonely, pre-occupied, angry, jealous. Can these feelings coexist with maturity, or are they proof of the opposite (pp. 70,71)?

THE UNKNOWN ADAM -- Dr. Crabb is aware of the power of sin; he is totally entrenched in Romans Seven. But he has not the faintest idea of Paul's answer to his plight via the finished work of the Cross (Gal. 2:20). His utterly futile hope is to "dismantle," "disrupt," or "destroy" the "fallen structure" within.

The more I commit myself to finding God in the middle of life's struggles, the more I become aware of something terribly wrong within me, something so evil that it must be overcome, but so strong that it reliably overcomes me. And yet it must be weakened and eventually destroyed [emphasis ours]. As long as this dark problem within me remains unchallenged, I will never find God (p. 73).

If and when he finds Paul's answer to indwelling Adam, it will be the means of his "finding God"!

HOPELESS HOPE --

There is a fundamental flaw in each of us that the Bible calls several names, including "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6), "the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16), and "the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23). We must not work primarily to solve our problems; we must rather cooperate with God's work to disrupt and destroy this fallen structure (p. 83).

We must work to dismantle our fallen structure, replacing the foundation of doubt with a rock-solid trust in God. Dismantling our fallen structure takes nothing short of a revolution. In a world as immoral as this one, and a people who are as determined as we are to fit into this world, we must hate and destroy the bad before the good can take its place (pp. 97,99).

As we promote God's purposes in this world, we must remain fiercely committed to the destruction of every trace of the enemy within. Until the foundation of our fallen structure crumbles, we cannot make ourselves nicer people by a mere act of the will (pp. 102,114).

THE SIN, OR THE SICKNESS, OF QUESTIONING GOD --

I answered the 'phone and listened as a pastor-friend told me that his friend's 24-year-old son had committed suicide last week--on Christmas Day. As I replaced the 'phone in its cradle, the questions came, unbidden and unexplainable, rushing through me like a torrent, carrying me into uncharted regions of thoughts that made me feel alive with dark passion.

"God, couldn't you have made it clear to this young man's godly parents that something was dreadfully wrong? Couldn't you then have given them the wisdom to know how to restore hope to their son's troubled soul? Their pain must be unimaginable! Don't you care?"

"And couldn't somebody have done something two weeks ago--or maybe ten years ago--that would have made the difference between life and death? Why didn't you lead someone to reach out to that young man? God, what's the matter with you?" Even as I asked the questions, I knew they would not be answered. No one knows the answers--except God. And He isn't talking, at least not with the answers I demand (p. 76).

Neither my terror nor my rage stops me from asking questions; in fact, they drive me to ask more. I know that God will not yield to my impudence and answer them, but still I ask. Putting my confusion into words generates a satisfying sense of power that helps me survive the inexplicable madness of life (p. 87).

Instead of being horrified at my impudence toward God, I sometimes feel smug, wondering how God might choose to defend himself against my well-supported charges that challenge his claim to goodness (p. 88).

Evidently it is left up to us to be horrified!

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE VERSUS OBJECTIVE TRUTH -- Dr. Crabb reveals a deep-set fear of, and a perverse attitude toward, objective scriptural truth as the basis for the Christian life.

When we are confronted with the inscrutable nature of God, when we are left without even the faintest sense of his presence [emphasis ours], we often respond in this way--our response to the hiddenness of God is to live in a fool's paradise [emphasis his]. Deny how much you struggle and hurt. Ignore your unanswerable questions. Keep telling yourself that everything is all right, that you love Jesus, that you love others, and that your trust in Christ is supplying you with fast-flowing streams of living water.

After hearing me preach on this, a man named Doug was clearly offended. "I see no value to rummage through your life to find pain," he said to me. "God tells me to forget what is behind and get on with life. When I face a problem, I go to the Word to find out what it says. And then it is up to me whether I obey. If I do what God tells me, then he blesses; if not, he disciplines.

"Why do you complicate things so much with all your talk of relationships and longings and motives? You are bringing the Trojan horse of psychology into the church. Stick to the Bible. Keep it simple. Do whatever God says."

Like so many, Doug was running from the hard facts of life by insisting that Christianity offers a simple formula for making life work. Because Doug was using obedience to avoid pain, he was living in a fool's paradise (pp. 78,79).

A psychologist's slur upon Christianity, sir. What of Dr. Crabb's admitted "paradise lost," and his being sunken deep into the subsoil of psychological subjectivism?

STORY-TELLING TIME...ALL OF THE TIME -- Dr. Crabb insists that there is no finding God apart from "community." By community he means cooperating with those of like mind, those who are trying to find God amidst their inner pain, loneliness, terror, hatred, and distrust of God. The process is akin to Steps 5 and 6 of AA's Twelve-Step Program: "Admitting to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

THE THEORY -- Dr. Crabb's theory is that in telling his story, in bringing all out before God and man, the resulting shame and embarrassment increase his yearning and determination to "find God."

The author has greatly multiplied and enhanced his process by telling all via this book. This is the reason for the book and its candid contents. He little realizes

that the revelation of his unhealthy emotional and spiritual condition constitutes the suicide of his testimony and ministry. On the basis of this book, are there now those who would submit themselves and their means to the counseling and teaching of this leadership and organization? Yes, there probably will be.

COMPULSIVE COMMENTARY -- Dr. Crabb's closing words of his Introduction are, "God has brought a severe mercy into my life to deepen my awareness of the need to seek him [emphasis ours]. Let me tell my story" (p. 20).

We must learn to tell the story of our lives--the good, the bad, and the ugly--to explore who we are: twisted image-bearers who live together in a community of other twisted image-bearers (p. 163).

Moving through our problems toward finding God requires us to tell the story of our lives in a way that disrupts [emphasis ours] our contentment with each element in the fallen structure, and awakens those deep longings in our hearts that make us pant after God (p. 183).

TRI-LEVEL STORY: "PRESENT," "INSIDE," AND "DEEPEST" --

PRESENT STORY --

When we tell our present story--the story that shows our determination to survive in a world without a good God, and our strategy for relating to a world of disappointing people--we recognize and disrupt the tough shell we have formed around ourselves, and we become enticed by the possibility of meaningful connection with others for their sake.

INSIDE STORY --

When we tell our inside story--the story that shows our demand that people come through for us because God doesn't, and our hatred towards others when they don't--we recognize and disrupt our stubbornness in trying to protect ourselves against what we so deeply fear, and we become enticed by our longing to live without pretense or defensiveness in community.

DEEPEST STORY --

When we tell our deepest story--the story that shows our doubt of God's goodness and our terror and rage when he doesn't come through for us--we get in touch with and disrupt the terror that corrupts our joy and the clenched-rage toward a God whose goodness does not guarantee our immediate comfort.

Telling our stories takes courage. Exposing the sinful passions that so often rule us requires humility. And letting ourselves feel how badly we want to be an instrument of good in other's lives, and to know a source of guidance that will free us to rest, will create an intense longing to know him better [emphasis ours]. We need to risk that he is good by telling our stories. We need to depend on his grace as we face our ugly passions. We need to trust that he will let us find him by entrusting to him the most profound, disappointed passions in our hearts.

Neither your present story nor your inside story exposes the core problem. You must tell the deepest story of your life, the tale of suspicion, terror, and rage that emerges from your attitude toward God (pp. 197,198,206).

DIRECTOR & DIRECTED...BY WHOM THOUSANDS ARE COUNSELED & TAUGHT --

Let me illustrate the process I want to describe...the process of finding God in a community of honest storytellers. I work with six colleagues. We all like and respect each other; but we are seven imperfect, sometimes petty, occasionally bizarre men whose love for God is not yet strong enough to keep our depraved urges completely controlled [emphases ours].

We meet weekly for two hours. Recently [1993] I came to a meeting with heavy burdens that I wasn't handling well. My mood was angry and despairing. I chose not to make known my troubles, but the other men quickly sensed my dark mood.

And yet it was never discussed. No one aggressively questioned me or consoled me or comforted me. And I never openly admitted the obvious fact that I was carrying a heavy weight. I never invited them to discuss my concerns.

We struggled to fill the time: business was handled, opinions were voiced, humor was offered, but none of us addressed the irritating and stifling effect of my mood in the group. I ended the meeting by announcing that I was no longer willing to attend pointless meetings where nothing of substance was discussed.

I instructed everyone who had a definite agenda for next week's meeting to distribute a memo stating his agenda and to come prepared to direct the time. Otherwise there would be no meeting. My last words were, "I'd rather stay in bed than get up for no purpose."

The tension was thick as we filed out of the room. Everyone was mad. I felt both offended (not one person directly probed to see what was going on inside me) and self-righteous. (Meetings should have a clear time-redeeming purpose.) For a time, I was buoyed by indignation.

That night I wanted to quit. The earlier angry despair sank into nihilation. I could see no point in working with these men, or anyone else. They were good men--I knew I could find none better--but we had no community. I knew it was partly my fault, partly theirs.

But I could not exactly identify the problem or the solution. I could talk about my anger, but I had done that before. Like so many others in similar seasons of relational tension, I saw no profit in airing the problems. They seemed hopeless. I wanted out.

With these thoughts swirling through my mind, I went to bed. I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned. I prayed. I begged God to give me a taste of himself, to make me aware of his presence, to restore a sense of mission and strength to my life.

But nothing came. The heavens were silent. The Spirit, I now believe, was grieved by my cowardly pride. God would not let me find him if I continued to justify my isolation from my brothers. You cannot pursue one without pursuing the other. Desperate prayer, disciplined fasting, and hours in the Word will not persuade God to reveal himself when we ignore relational tension.

Within a few days, one of the men told us he had an agenda for the next meeting. I didn't want to attend, but the condition I imposed for regathering was met. I showed up. All of us did, except for one--he was sick. I envied him.

After the agenda was presented, I turned to the one presenting it and pointedly said that I felt he was pulling away from me, and that the plans outlined in his agenda reflected that movement. I told the others that I sensed a spirit of competition developing between us regarding a ministry they were pursuing that paralleled one that I was doing. I know I was dropping bombs. As soon as I dropped them, however, an emergency 'phone call pulled me away from the meeting.

We met again five days later. We agreed to explore openly the impact we were having on one another. I call that telling our present story [emphasis ours]. We moved from the immediate issues of conflict into a discussion of how our styles of relating were provoking strong feelings.

One of the men with whom I felt a spirit of competition stated that I had badly used him. I never knew he felt that way and was unaware of what I had done to contribute to those feelings. We went back and forth discussing the matter for some time. Eventually, I became aware of something stirring in me, something beneath my defensive explanations for what I had done.

I loved this man. And I had hurt him. When I admitted that to myself, I felt deeply grieved. Something changed inside me. Nothing seemed more important than my desire to treat him well. I put into words the energy stirring within me. It was a good moment, but not complete.

The desire to love him better, once expressed, opened a door to deeper parts within me. I hadn't intended to use my friend and I felt hurt by his lack of trust. I felt alone and hopeless. As I verbalized those concerns, I was beginning to tell my inside story. The tale of a man who longs for what he has never received. I put it this way: "I feel important to many but liked by few."

Another colleague prompted more of my inside story by saying that of the ten most important sentences ever said to him, I had spoken five. As he spoke, I trembled with pain. "That's just the problem," I said, "I'm valued for my ability to help, but no one thinks of me when it's time to have fun."

With that sentence, my mind was flooded with hard memories: the party to which I was not invited, thrown by a couple who told me I had saved their marriage. Everyone in our social circle was invited but my wife and me. Why? Another memory came: the time after an unusually dramatic counseling session, held in front of my counseling students, when dozens of people flocked about the counselee while I walked slowly out of the room, drained, unnoticed, alone.

But even as I felt the crushing weight of aloneness, a strange exhilaration rushed through me. I can only describe it as a sense of being, the thrill of living. I exist. I live in a fallen world where, like every other honest person, I feel alone, but I am alive with something to offer. No pain or damage can rob me of that. By the miracle of grace, I can go on as a person committed to a far higher purpose than relieving loneliness. And I can face my weakness and hurts, and be moved by the affection that sometimes comes my way.

But it isn't enough. It never will be. My colleagues felt my pain. The compassion in their hearts was visible in their eyes. I felt for them. They felt for me. But in the middle of rich unity, we began to realize, perhaps with new force, the insufficiency of our love for one another.

And that awareness led to telling our deepest story. We were silenced by our need for a purpose larger than ourselves. All our burdens and jealousies seemed petty in comparison to a big picture that was emerging with clarity. We needed to relate with someone who is telling a larger story than any of us could see, and who could help us move through still unresolved tensions toward a goal that by sheer vastness dwarfed all other objectives.

We began talking about our commitment to God. No other topic seemed to matter. We felt small, but hopeful. Worship seemed to spread through the room. We were impressed with God. After a time of savoring the sweet fragrance of worship, we ended the meeting.

A few decisions had been made. We had faced significant tensions but did not resolve them. But we left with a renewed desire to give to one another, to offer our unique contributions to the body of Christ, and to live for the glory of Someone beyond ourselves.

We had told our present story of mutual failure and hurt until conviction broke open our hearts and released our passion to give. We told our inside story of disappointment and loneliness until pain gave way to a passion to be. And we told our deepest story of a longing to rest on another's strength until we fall into worship (pp. 192-196).

So much for the leadership personnel of "a ministry committed to training Christians to resolve life's problems biblically and to help others in the context of Christian community."

EXEMPLIFICATION

Suppose Dr. Crabb were to sit down with you, knee to knee, and say, "Let me tell my story." He would proceed to pour out upon you his tale of deep, unbearable, emotional pain, his terrible loneliness, his hatreds, his jealousies, his inadequacy, his fear and terror, his times of anger and rage against God, his questioning and challenging Him concerning His love, motives, and ways.

He would tell you of his struggles to undermine, obstruct, dismantle, shatter and destroy the fallen structure within. Also of his seeking to sense God's presence, and to feel His love. Above all would be the account of his futile quest of "finding God." In time, he would say to you, "Now tell me your story."

You, a growing believer of some years, would have to reply, "Dear brother Larry, I am sorry to have to disappoint you, but:

"Since the day long ago when I was recreated in Christ Jesus, the appalling thought of questioning, or challenging, or being angry toward my heavenly Father has never entered my mind.

"There is no inner pain, but rather the peace of God which passeth all understanding. I love my Father, who first loved me with a love that casteth out fear. He has proven and established His eternal love for me at the Cross--I do not

have to 'feel' that which is based upon His rightly-divided Word of truth. And His love has never varied as He continues to work all things together for my good, in His ongoing process of conforming me to the image of His Beloved Son.

"I have found my sovereign Father upon His throne in glory, before which I have been positioned by my identification in Christ ascended. I increasingly know my Father as I grow in the knowledge of the Son.

"The Lord Jesus is not only my Saviour, but He is my Life; hence my life is hidden with Christ in God. I have been made fit to be there, and am seated before my Father, where I abide, fellowship, and worship. Hence there is no need to 'sense' His presence, since I rest there in spirit, by the Holy Spirit.

"As for the fallen Adam within, I need not seek to supplement the finished work of the Cross, having died there in Christ unto sin, Adam, law, the world, Satan and all his demons. At the same time I count myself a new creation, alive unto the Father in the Son."

At this point, if not before, there will be an interruption. Dr. Crabb will say, "You are living in a fool's paradise, and being smug and arrogant by such claims to identification and position. You are resorting to that ploy in order to cover up and avoid the same things in you that are in me, and everyone else. You are simply in denial; you are not being honest. Now tell me your true story--all three tiers."

To which you would have to say, "Dear brother Crabb, I have just told you my story, which is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ--and I much prefer that to one centered in Dr. Lawrence Crabb, Jr."

[Oct. '93.]



"Beth, you must learn to recognize Sam's needs, and, Sam, you must learn to recognize Beth's needs, and you both must learn to recognize my needs."