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The Pain That Opens Our Hearts to Search For God is Deep (Let's Face It)

Jo Ann Davidson
Andrews University, jad@andrews.edu

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L E T ' S F A C E I T



Jo Ann Davidson*

I suppose Dr. Larry Crabb's book, *Finding God*,** which I plucked out of Norman Gully's library, spoke to my soul so powerfully because it came from a heart anguished by his brother's death in a plane crash. A crash while Crabb was in church meditating on God's goodness and mercy. . . .

"Theology becomes rich only when it survives the onslaught of pain," he was to conclude. And sound theology, Crabb writes, "leads us through our pain to a fuller experience of Christ, and therefore of hope and love and joy. The gripping message of the Bible will never be fully heard in the library [even the one where I found his book!]. When we value scholarly precision and doctrinal purity above a personally transforming encounter with the God who reveals himself in his Word, when we fail to see that an

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academic grasp of Scripture often leads to a proud appreciation of knowledge more than a humble and passionate appreciation of Christ, we develop an orthodoxy that crushes life. And we miss the gospel that frees us to live. . . .

"The pain that opens our hearts to search for God is deep. It is not the peevish pain of a grumbler who mutters or mumbles in discontent. It is not the angry pain of a narcissist who finds out that self-centeredness has consequences. It is not the usual psychological hurt we hear so much about today that creates a thirst for nothing more than liking ourselves better and enjoying life more.

"Rather, it is the pain of someone who wants to enjoy pleasures he cannot find and who fears that misery

* Jo Ann Davidson is a wife, mother, and Assistant Professor of Theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

** Larry Crabb, Jr. *Finding God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993).

seems inevitable and perhaps deserved. It is pain that makes us stand still and think about something outside of ourselves, something more important and more interesting than our concerns about who we are and how we're getting on. It is pain that compels us to ask terrifying questions about life and God. . . .

"Only the frightening, immobilizing, and awe-inspiring realization that we are out of the Garden with no way back in and the supernatural powers hover about us will stop us long enough to hear what is beyond our immediate experience. Only that dreadful awareness will create an alertness that enables us to hear God speak through his Word to introduce us to an unmistakably new dimension of life. . . ." (pp. 29, 30).

Crabb's book, I noted, is now a decade old. No matter: I heard God calling me through its pages to really find him and surrender completely to his ways.

"Enoch walked with God. It became clear that if I wanted to come to God as Enoch did, I needed more than a simple prayer of commitment and a few extra efforts to discipline myself into spiritual shape. Surgery without anesthesia was called for, radical surgery that would cut out every demand that things must go my way. . .

"But the surgical process, I realized, was not easy. Not only must I

consciously commit myself to purity of purpose, I must renew that commitment regularly, especially when the pain in my heart screams for relief. . . . When I realize that my commitment to self is fueled by angry doubts that God cannot be trusted to do for me what needs doing, then a spirit of repentance develops, a willingness to turn away from self-centered purposes in order to seek God.

"The surgery, however, is not over in a day. Rather, the Surgeon follows me around with knife in hand, gently pointing out further evidence of my disease of self-ism and waiting for me to lie still enough for another incision. The surprising effect of this surgery is that I now give more energy to pursuing God's purposes and to watching out for contrary agendas within me, but as I submit to the Surgeon, I grieve more over my weak commitment to Christ than over whatever harsh treatment I may endure, and I rejoice more over the Lord's kindness than I do over my bolstered self-esteem.

"Anyone who comes to God must come as Enoch came, consciously surrendering his life to eternal purposes, fully aware that God does not always guarantee the immediate comfort of his children" (pp. 34, 35).

Let's face it, as I had to while reading Crabb, we need much more of this "walking with God" that

Enoch's life displayed.

As Crabb points out, "we cannot and will not love anyone but ourselves until we meet God in a way that stirs us to race after him with single-minded intensity, until our deepest desire is to get to know him better.

"And that's our problem. In a culture so thoroughly devoted to life now, and in a church drenched with teaching on self-improvement and building happier lives, we can't easily develop a passion for something other than our immediate satisfaction. The historic church, in its role as embassy of a foreign kingdom, taught that the chief end of people is to glorify God and enjoy him forever; the modern church too often teaches that the chief end of God is to gratify people. . . .

"Does anyone really sacrifice immediate well-being for the privilege of knowing Christ? Hebrews 11 is full of the stories of people—some remarkable, some ordinary, all weak and sinful—whose lives were marked by a transcendent passion for what this world could never offer. Abraham left a familiar and comfortable lifestyle to go where a supernatural

voice directed him. Moses discarded the luxuries of palace living to wander through the wilderness with a million or so fickle followers. Others chose to be sawed in half rather than give up their loyalty to God. . . .

"What passion drove them to forfeit their immediate comfort? Not one of them received what he naturally desired. They all died with nothing more than confidence in a God they had come to know. They were people like you and me, normal people who preferred comfort to pain—*unless comfort interfered with their finding God*. For them, nothing mattered more than finding God" (pp. 46, 47).

Crabb not only builds a compelling case for the necessity of truly finding God, but he also, as a Christian psychologist, helpfully describes how the fallen human personality hinders our quest for God. Moreover, he includes practical helps for the growing Christian, which I will let you find in the book. If you sometimes feel you are groping in the dark in your relationship with God, this book must help. I hunger for a deeper relationship with God as a result of reading it.

"He who did not grudge his own Son but gave him up for us all—can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need?" (Rom. 8:32, Phillips).
