

Becoming a
TRUE
SPIRITUAL
COMMUNITY

*A Profound Vision of What
the Church Can Be*

LARRY CRABB

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

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Formerly titled *The Safest Place on Earth*

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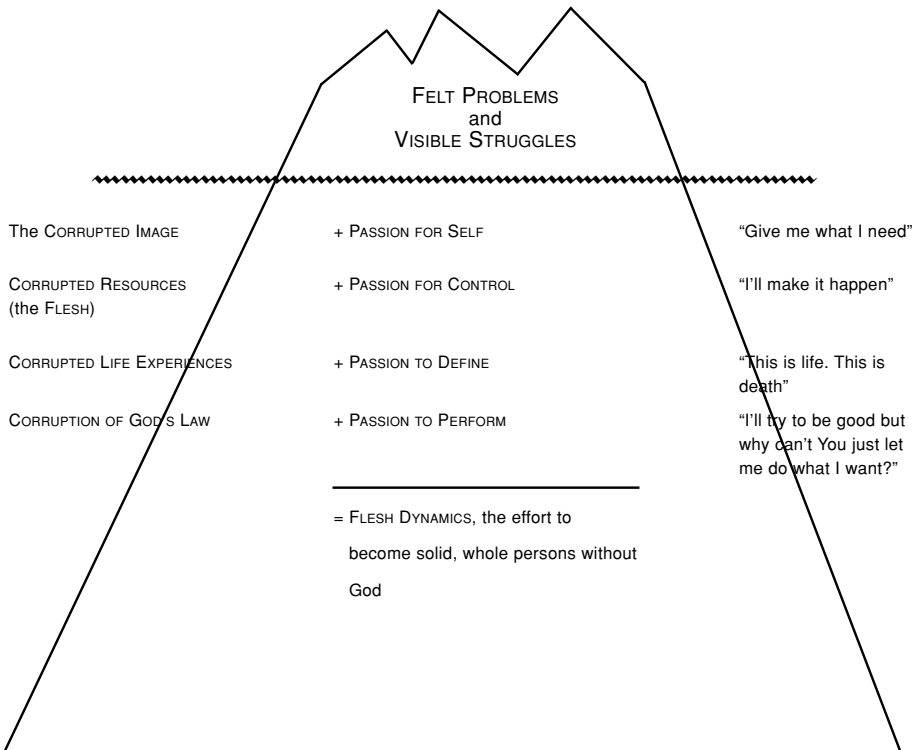
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CHAPTER 9

Lower Room Furnishings



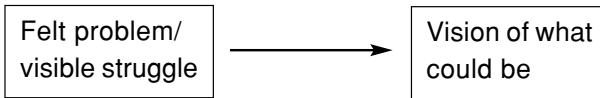
CHAPTER 11

Upper Room Furnishings

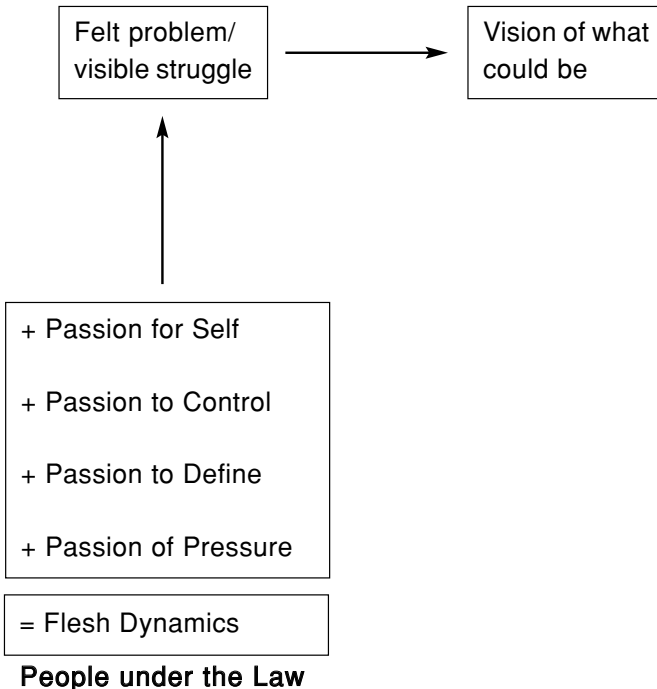
Someone has a problem and he or she is struggling.

Felt problem/
visible struggle

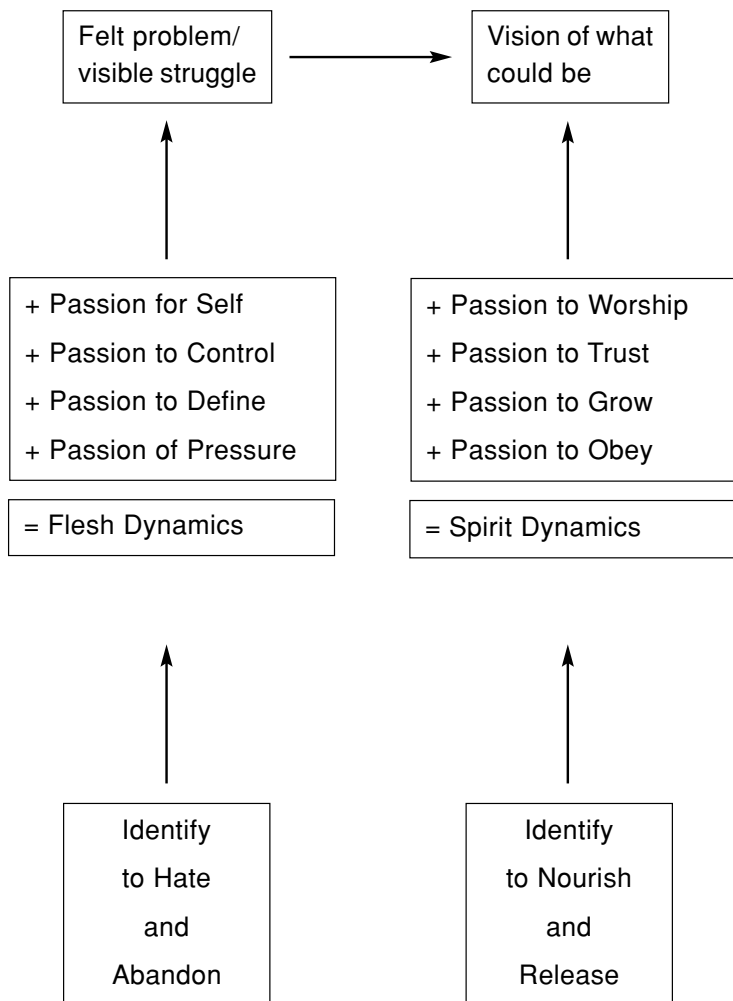
A spiritual friend sees the struggle and immediately envisions what the Spirit could do in this person's life.



That friend knows the battle is real. Beneath the problem, the Lower Room is spewing forth its poison. The snakes of *flesh dynamics* are crawling everywhere.



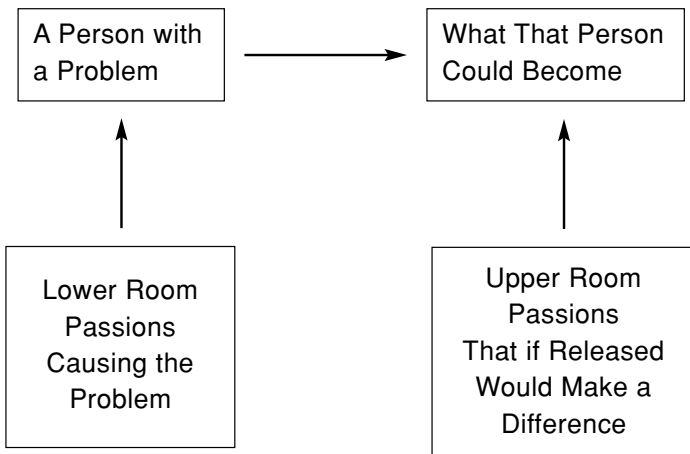
A truly spiritual friend knows that no element of someone's *Flesh Dynamics* can be improved. They can be identified, but only to be abandoned, hated, mortified, never fixed or socialized. Real change toward *Spirit Dynamics* depends on outside help, and that help has been given. There is another room, another source of energy that if released could move the individual toward the vision of what he or she could be.



CHAPTER 13

The Fork in the Road to Spiritual Community

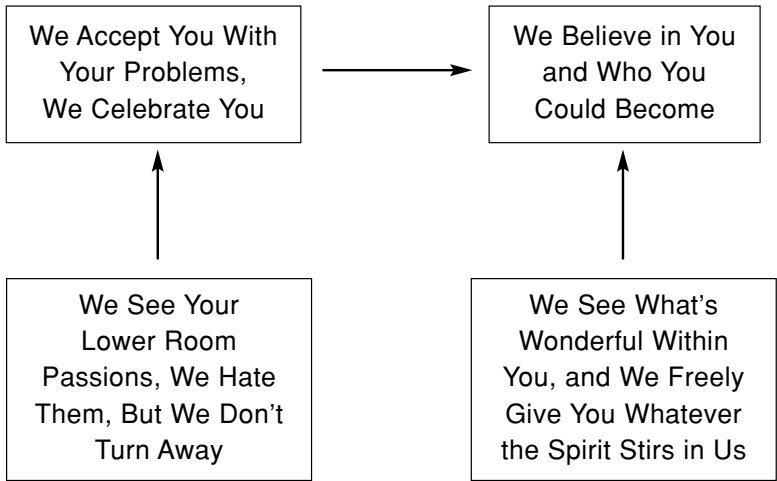
When a person with a problem turns his chair toward spiritual community, this is what that community sees.



When spiritual community sees a troubled person, New Covenant passions *toward God* are translated into New Covenant passions *toward that person*.

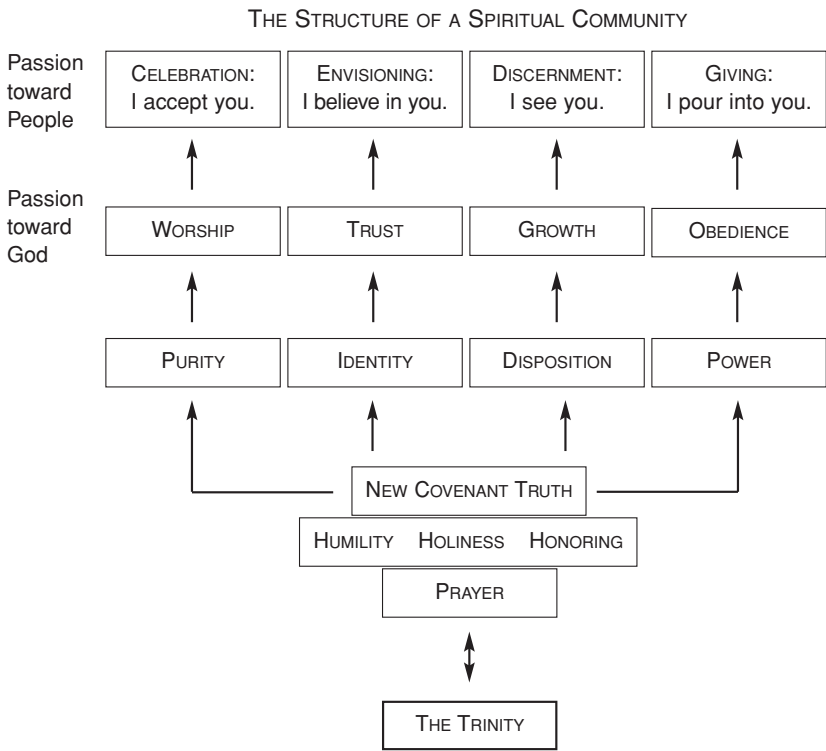
New Covenant Provision	Passionate Response to God	Passionate Response to Person
1. New Purity	Worship	Celebration
2. New Identity	Trust	Envisioning
3. New Disposition	Eagerness to Grow	Discernment
4. New Power	Eagerness to Obey	Giving

As chairs are turned, this is what the troubled person hears from spiritual community and receives as food for his soul.



CHAPTER 16

ENTER, SEE, TOUCH:
A Way of Developing Spiritual Community



Questions for Thought and Discussion

Introduction:

Let's Turn Our Chairs

- Perhaps the Holy Spirit sees members of the church the way Dr. Crabb saw those people in Miami, lined up and sitting in rocking chairs, facing straight ahead with no life passing back and forth between them. When, if ever, have you done the fellowship things church folks do—“tell personal stories, share prayer requests, discuss interesting things, reflect on biblical texts, worship together, sometimes even weep for one another”—and yet felt that no real connection was happening? What do you think was missing—and why?
- Dr. Crabb holds out the vision of Christians experiencing “a kind of oneness that makes us aware of what’s best inside us and of all the bad stuff that blocks its release, a *penetrating* oneness that releases nice little boys to be men and sweet little girls to be women.” What is appealing to you about this vision? What is threatening? What could you do about your hesitation or fear?
- In Part I, Dr. Crabb will describe a way of thinking about spiritual community. At this point, before you read any further, what comes to mind when you hear the phrase “spiritual community”? What examples of spiritual community (as you think of it) have you heard of, seen, or perhaps even been a part of?
- In Part II, Dr. Crabb will develop a way of understanding our struggles that makes it clear why spiritual friends and spiritual

directors are important to life's journey. Whom do you consider a spiritual friend? If you've ever had a spiritual director, how did you benefit? If you haven't, how might you benefit?

- Why did you pick up this book—because of an experience in the past, hunger in the present, or hope about the future? What, if anything, did the introduction make you long for?

Let's start laying the foundation for the nuts and bolts of Dr. Crabb's message—a way of relating in this world that defines what it means to be in spiritual community. Let's get ready to turn our chairs.

PART I

A Way of Thinking about Spiritual Community

CHAPTER 1

For God's Sake, Don't Expect It to Be Easy

- Neither the goal of spiritual life nor the process involved is clearly understood: Exactly what does it mean to be whole and mature in Christ—and how do we get there? Apart from Jesus in the Bible, what model(s) of Christian maturity have you seen? Be specific about the evidence of spiritual maturity in that person's life.
- Confusion and disappointment are inevitable on the journey toward spiritual maturity. But the up side of confusion is openness, and the up side of disappointment is that it inspires hope by making it necessary. What confusion about living spiritually in an unspiritual world—about Christian maturity and how to attain it—have you experienced? What disappointments have you encountered along the way, disappointments that God is undoubtedly using to grow your faith and make you mature in Christ?
- Review Dr. Crabb's discussion of the "hot topics" surrounding his ideas. What surprised you or taught you something new? With what points do you especially disagree and/or agree? Give one or two examples.
- Where are you in need of soul care? Why would Dr. Crabb suggest spiritual friendship and spiritual direction, instead of psychological counseling, for someone in need of soul care?

The only unconfusing and thoroughly nondisappointing fact in life is that Christ's atonement guarantees the Spirit's unstopping work in our lives, from conception through death and on into eternity. In that we find hope for a soul in need of care.

CHAPTER 2

It's Not Easy, but It's Worth It

- Our natural foundations must be destroyed if true spirituality is to develop. And this happens when, in His bewildering mercy, God sometimes shatters our fondest dreams, or at least allows them to be shattered. In His sovereignly run universe, the unthinkable happens, the nightmare we thought we'd never have to face. When have your dreams been shattered? What nightmare have you had to face? What has prompted you to ask, "Who is this God I claim to love? And where is He?" What, if anything, can you see at this point of your life about how God is using these experiences to grow you toward spiritual maturity?
- Henri Nouwen wrote about his inner wound "that is so easily touched and starts bleeding again," saying, "It is there to stay, but maybe for a good reason. Perhaps it is a gateway to my salvation, a door to glory, and a passage to freedom." Share your thoughts about how a wound can be such a gift. Consider what kind of salvation, glory, and freedom a wound can lead to.
- The path to the joy of God's presence always leads through joyless isolation, when the part of us that most longs for connection is alone. When that happens, the nature of our spiritual community is revealed. When have you taken the kind of risk Dr. Crabb took and shared something of your self, your spiritual journey, and perhaps even your woundedness with someone or with a group of

people? What reactions did you not want . . . what reaction did you hope for . . . and what reaction did you receive? What did you realize from that experience about the kind or degree of Christian community available to you?

- Dr. Crabb has given up on healing—on a repair job on what is wrong that will lessen his struggles. Instead he wants to focus more on finding God and less on solving problems, more on worshipping God in any circumstance and less on using God to improve his circumstances, more on a journey and less on pathology. Why do we so often experience the opposite and our focus switches from progressing spiritually to healing emotionally or improving things circumstantially? And when have you heard—or perhaps said—the kinds of sentences that take us on a detour from knowing God and off the narrow road of glorifying Him?
- We're a community of fixers. We can't stand to see a problem we can't do something about. And we like to label each other's problems because labels give us a sense of control. We're not curious about how God might be at work, and we don't realize that life's valleys do not primarily represent problems to be solved, but rather are opportunities for spiritual companionship. What current circumstances in your life make you wonder how God is at work? What present situation is an opportunity for spiritual companionship?
- What did you find most stirring about Dr. Crabb's call in this chapter to build the church into a community of people who take refuge in God and encourage each other never to flee to another source of help?

A central task of community is to become a place safe enough for each of us to own our brokenness. Only then can the power of connecting do its job. Only then can community be used of God to restore our souls.

CHAPTER 3

Spiritual Community: What It Is

- When have you been with a small group of believers and found your appetite for holy things stirred and your longing to know God become intense? What do you think contributed to that stirring? What, if anything, did you do about satisfying that appetite and fulfilling that longing?
- Henri Nouwen wrote, “I ponder my experience and I recognize once more that the way for us to be in this world is to focus on the spiritual life.” When have you seen this focus on the spiritual life enable someone “to be in this world”? Ideally, give an example from your life, but an example from the life of someone you know may also be helpful.
- C. S. Lewis observed, “Put first things first and second things are thrown in. Put second things first and you lose both first and second things.” Using this statement as a lens through which to look at your life, what does it suggest about your approach to current pain or problems? What might putting first things first (glorifying God through worship and trust being the first thing) look like in your present circumstances?
- Review Dr. Crabb’s dialogue with his friend, noting especially the analysis he provided afterward. What did you

appreciate about Dr. Crabb's approach? What was new about this approach? Why could it be helpful?

- Dr. Crabb comments, "Counselors spend wasted time trying to improve what God has abandoned." In what situations might that be true? When God has abandoned an aspect in our life, what role can the Holy Spirit play in that room in our souls?

In a spiritual community, people reach deep places in each other's hearts that are not often or easily reached. They discover places beneath the awkwardness of wanting to embrace and cry and share opinions. They openly express love and reveal fear, even though they feel so unaccustomed to that level of intimacy. Spiritual togetherness creates movement. Togetherness in Christ encourages movement toward Christ.

CHAPTER 4

It Takes an Armando

- We human beings too easily commit to safety *from* people and don't take the risks that might allow us to enjoy safety *with* people. Who in your life fits each category? More specifically, with whom do you feel the need to protect yourself and keep yourself safe? And with whom do you feel safe to share yourself, warts and all? Which list is longer? Why?
- It is our weakness, not our competence, that moves others; our suffering, not our blessings, that breaks down the barriers of fear and shame that keep us apart; our admitted failures, not our paraded successes, that bind us together in hope. When have you experienced this truth in your relationships? Be specific and consider why the connections happened perhaps rather unexpectedly.
- We often hear that brokenness is the pathway to a deeper relationship with God, but we rarely see it modeled. (Too often we want others to believe that we know God by demonstrating how together we are!) When have you seen brokenness lead to a deeper relationship with God? Offer an example from your own life, from the life of someone you know, or from the life of someone in the Bible.
- If we face ourselves fully, we will be broken by what we see, by the selfishness and fear and rage and lust that cover our spiritual beauty

like tarnish on silver. But the silver is there. Labeling each other makes the shine of that silver hard to see. Labels also encourage us to believe that our problems define us. What labels have been given to you by others? What labels have you given to yourself? In what ways are these limits confining, limiting, or protecting you?

- Look back over the following passages. What lesson did these offer you personally?

— The description of Armando and the bishop

— Dr. Crabb's conversation with Rich

— Dr. Crabb's response to Beth

A spiritual community consists of people who have the integrity to come clean. That happens only when we have the confidence that ugliness and conflict will not end a relationship, a confidence that grows out of an even stronger confidence that what is deepest within is not brokenness but beauty, the literal beauty of Christ.

CHAPTER 5

Unspiritual Community

- In unspiritual community, we tend either to hide our problems or to parade them (see the chapter's first three paragraphs). Which of these directions do you lean toward now or have you chosen in the past? Explain your choice and briefly describe how the community in which you did the choosing may have encouraged your choice.
- Maggie Ross describes the spiritual life as continually beginning to understand that loneliness is really a hunger for God. When in your life, if ever, have you sensed that truth for yourself? Or now, looking back on a lonely time, can you see that loneliness as a hunger for God? What did you do about your loneliness—or what are you doing about it now? What antidote to loneliness does defining it as “a hunger for God” suggest?
- Maggie Ross seems to go on to say that true relationship with each other (what Dr. Crabb calls connecting or spiritual community) is not possible without rich and abiding communion with God. What are you doing—or what could you be doing—to have “rich and abiding communion with God”? What do you find yourself *wanting* to do? Be specific.
- Human relationships inevitably encounter conflict, and only the resources of the Spirit are adequate to move us through conflict into true relationship. When have you let conflict serve as an opportunity

to draw more fully on spiritual resources? Be specific about those resources and how they helped in the conflict. When has conflict been an opportunity for spiritual friendship to flourish? Give details about the friend and the kind of soul care he/she offered you. And when could a conflict you encountered have been an opportunity for you to connect with a spiritual director and experience soul care? How might the resolution of the conflict been different?

- Conflict is latent in every human relationship at every moment. It simply awaits a trigger, and our sin, self-occupied passions, and brokenness (broad categories all) serve as triggers. When, if ever, have you had this ugly, selfish side of you seen and accepted but not condoned by a friend, by a person who knows brokenness, who cares about you living well, who pours the life he or she has received from God into you? Or when have you been able to extend such gracious acceptance to another? In what ways does such acceptance affect the person being received?
- Without divine resources we can't extend or receive the kind of acceptance we just considered. And instead we hide conflict behind *congeniality*; we rechannel it into *cooperation* on a worthy project; or we find *consolation* to soothe the pain we feel. If the conflict is severe, we work through our issues in *counseling* or we let *conforming* pressures try to contain our ugliness within renewed efforts to do better. Which of your current relationships fall under "Unspiritual Community," relationships that we develop in order to handle conflict? As you look at your lists, consider whether you long for more—and what that "more" might be.

No one knows or is known by another without entering more fully into God's presence. The resources for connecting with each other must be given to us by the Spirit and nourished by yielding to Him as much as Mary did in order to conceive. Spiritual community depends on spiritual resources, but so much of our community time is unspiritual. In the next chapter, Dr. Crabb asks what makes unspiritual community unspiritual and looks more closely at the five kinds of relationships that we sometimes assume are spiritual.

CHAPTER 6

Why Unspiritual Community Is Unspiritual

- Look again at the opening account of Dr. Crabb's interaction with his friend. Describe what Dr. Crabb did. What did you learn from his response to his friend—and, in turn, his friend's response? In what relationship(s) could you follow his example and offer prayer rather than interpretations, advice, or attempts to fix the situation?
- Dr. Crabb believes that the root of all nonmedical human struggle is really a spiritual problem, a disconnection from God that creates a disconnection from oneself and from others. That disconnection consists of a determination to take care of oneself in the face of a disappointing and sometimes assaultive world where we conclude that no one exists who has our best interests at heart. That's unbelief. The resolve to look after oneself (call that *rebellion*) breaks fellowship with God and others and involves a violation of our created nature to be givers (disconnection from self). Does this diagnosis fit your personal struggles, past or present? The struggles of people you know? Would it fit the person involved in a divorce? A person addicted to pornography? A person dealing with an incestuous childhood? Explain why you answered yes or no in each case.
- In community, our determination to fully trust no one must die and an eager willingness to receive what is best from others and to give

what is best from within ourselves must take its place. That only happens when people feel loved, safe, trusting, and courageous—and still it requires a risk. When, if ever, have you risked being fully known—or at least more fully known—by another person? If so, what happened? What lessons did you learn about yourself . . . about God . . . about community? If you haven't taken that risk, what roadblocks stand in your path?

- Review the discussion of “Conflicted Community,” specifically the comments of the apostle James, Ashley Montagu, Charlotte Buhler, Abraham Maslow, and Dr. Crabb. What points were especially significant to you? As you consider the source of conflict, with which perspective do you most agree? Why? In your view, is the drive toward self-actualization good or bad? Explain.
- When our agendas directly compete with someone else's self-occupied agenda, conflict erupts, and we too easily depend on one of five kinds of relationship to handle the conflict, none of which belong to spiritual community. Look again at the description of each. What weakness(es) do you find in each type of relationship? Put differently, how does each contradict your idea of spiritual, biblical community?
- The final five paragraphs of this chapter are filled with vision and hope. What do you find most appealing about what Dr. Crabb says here? Most challenging?

Psychologists C. H. Patterson and Suzanne Hidore propose that the essence of all successful psychotherapy is love, but Dr. Crabb is disturbed by the idea of purchasing love via therapy. But we have turned to professionals because spiritual community is rare. We offer congenial, cooperative, consoling, counseling, and conforming relationships to people in conflict. Can we do better?

PART II

A Way of Understanding Our Struggles

CHAPTER 7

Two Rooms

- Review the discussion of the two rooms and then briefly describe the two rooms in your own words. Why are “Upper” and “Lower” appropriate designations even though they aren’t spatially accurate? In response to the first list, identify evidence that you are living like a citizen of the Lower Room. Then identify which aspect(s) of the Upper Room makes it most appealing.
- Dr. Crabb describes the furnishings in the Lower Room: (1) We long for good relationships; (2) we look after our own needs; (3) our worlds frustrate and satisfy us, sometimes more one than the other; (4) we learn what we like and go after it; and (5) we are aware of a moral code that tells us what we should or should not do in our pursuit of happiness. Lower Rooms also often contain hard memories of, as in Sheila’s case, an alcoholic father and clinging mother. What percentage of your time are you living in your Lower Room? What influences try to keep you there? What hard memories keep you there? How, if at all, do you try to merely add God to this room? Describe your level of success.
- C. S. Lewis once said that if we discover desires within us that nothing in this world can satisfy, we really should wonder if we were designed for another world. When, if ever, have you recognized such

desires within you? Describe such a moment. What does this observation by Lewis suggest about the two rooms?

- Despite occasional and momentary dissatisfaction with the Lower Room, many people live there quite happily for a long time. They see no value in brokenness and radical trust because their resources are keeping life together quite well, and the unspiritual community of congenial, cooperative, comforting, counseling, and conforming relationships seems to work. When, if ever, have you been forced to admit that true life and true community and true joy are not available in the Lower Room that for so long you have called home? What circumstances and/or realizations contributed to that admission?
- Read again Dr. Crabb's letter to Sheila, imagining this time that he's writing to you. What encouragement do you find there? What specific points of application will you try for yourself?

To change rooms, to hear the Spirit speak through God's Word to us, to enjoy communion with Christ and sense the Father's presence, and then to speak from that room into the reality of our difficult lives, two things need to happen. One, we need to see our Lower Room for what it is and, two, we need to join a church, to become part of a community of people on a journey to God. In the next two chapters, Dr. Crabb further describes the Lower Room, hoping to help you both see it for what it is and then feel an excited desperation to find a man carrying water who can lead you to your Upper Room.

CHAPTER 8

There Is a Lower Room

- The chapter opens with Dr. Crabb's perhaps startling statement "I have had moments when I wondered if my faith would survive." What situations in your life have threatened your trust in God? What kept you anchored in your faith despite the pain and confusion—or, if you did fall away for a season, what brought you back?
- Seeing in three people the forces of wretchedness overcome in substantial measure by the forces of greatness helped Dr. Crabb stay anchored in his faith. Name someone in your life who has known dishonor or heartbreak that exposed their feet of clay, yet from whom a seemingly indestructible and uncorrupted life radiates. What correlation have you seen between excruciatingly difficult trials and compelling faith in Jesus?
- Wretchedness, our own wretchedness, must be recognized not only as a past reality but also as a present reality. Why do we—individually as well as corporately—fail to see our wretchedness? Why do we balk at acknowledging it? Why do we downplay, if not totally ignore, our wretchedness? Give five or six reasons in answer to these three questions.
- Review Pascal's quote as another step toward getting rid of the idea that wretchedness is evidence of complexity (rather than unholiness or wickedness) or psychological disturbance (as

opposed to sin) and that greatness is the manageable product of good training, economic advantage, or, if necessary, therapy. Then, as a further step toward acknowledging your wretchedness, cite from your own life a behavior or a comment that is an example of a hybrid of Lower and Upper Room energy.

- Dr. Crabb offers an overview both of our current culture and of the history that brought us to our present level of morality. What points that he made were new, striking, and/or alarming?

Whatever is wrong with us destroys relationships and makes spiritual community impossible. Until we recover a distinctly Christian view of this wretchedness—that lies beneath eating disorders and multiple personalities and sexual addictions and relational conflict—the value of spiritual community will not be recognized. But along with a depth view of moral wretchedness, we must also recover a rich understanding of universal priesthood in the church. We're all priests, we all have direct access to God and can draw near to Him, and we all have the life of the Spirit within us waiting to be poured into others. And it is that life that can heal the soul.

CHAPTER 9

Lower Room Furnishings

- C. S. Lewis makes a distinction between solid people and ghosts. Solid people have given up whatever idols they had depended on to give them life, and that surrendering doesn't come without suffering. Suffering brings into focus what one's soul most deeply yearns for and a person is directed to God. Dr. Crabb tells of a time when he was a ghost. When have you met an unsafe ghost? When have you been an unsafe ghost? In both cases be specific in your description and your analysis of what lay behind the ghostlike quality.
- Lower Room, cesspool, flesh, snakes, cellar sins—each description fits. How did you respond as you read about these aspects of yourself? What did God show you about yourself through these descriptions?
- Review the statements of Henri Nouwen, C. S. Lewis, and Richard Lovelace commenting on Jonathan Edwards. What better understanding of the Lower Room did each offer you? What phrases were especially striking or convicting?
- Dr. Crabb confesses a time when he entered the ring and knocked out his Animal Self but had not seen his Diabolical Self sitting ring-side and grinning broadly. As he said, "The snakes were crawling,

the stench from the cesspool was rising—and I thought I had just splashed on some cologne.” Be specific about a similar experience of one of your own cellar sins.

- Look again at the four furnishings of our Lower Room. Review the more detailed descriptions as well.
 - The corrupted *image* of God that fills us with a *passion* for *self*
 - The corrupted *resources* we’ve been given as human beings that fill us with a *passion* for *control*
 - Pleasurable and painful *life experiences* that we corrupt by responding to them with a *passion* to *define* life (pleasures we must reexperience) and death (pain we must avoid)
 - The corruption of *God’s holy law* that was given to reveal our need but now stimulates a *passion* to *perform* that literally drives us mad

What action, statement, and/or attitude during the last week did God call to mind as you read the descriptions of these furnishings either initially or just now? Which sinful passion—for self, control, definition, or performance—do you most grapple with? In your own words, why are the smell of the cesspool and the sense of serpents crawling up your legs valuable to your own walk with the Lord and essential to spiritual community?

The passion for self (“Give me what I need”), the passion for control (“I’ll make it happen”), the passion to define (“This is life, and this is death”), and the passion to perform (“I’ll try to be good, but can’t You just let me do what I want?”) are what Dr. Crabb calls “flesh dynamics,” our effort to become solid, whole persons without God. And these dynamics are the smelly cesspool, the slithering serpents. How can we build spiritual community with these passions ruling our lives? We can’t. But God has a plan that can lead us to spiritual community. . . .

CHAPTER 10

There *Is* an Upper Room

- “A Christian world-view provides reason to respect each other, to expect to learn from every encounter with a fellow image bearer. Only in Christianity is there a clear basis for regarding each other as having profound worth.” Explain the basis for this respect and regard. Use Scripture if you’d like.
- Spiritual community is always a miracle because we all have people in our lives—people like Peggy, Marshall, Marlene, Gary, Suzanne, and Mel—in whom we struggle to see the Upper Room. Which small group experiences or individuals came to mind as you read about these folks? Give several examples and make that list of people a focus of a prayer of confession as you ask God to transform not only your heart but your perspective on these people He created, some of whom He has welcomed into His family because of their faith in His Son. Spiritual community never happens without the Spirit, so pray for God’s Spirit to be active within you and yield yourself to His work.
- We are all too prone to “connect” with others from our Lower Room and to see only that room in others, a fact that makes marriage quite challenging. As Dr. Crabb says of his own marriage, “Perhaps our greatest battle, and at the same time our richest blessing, has been to see the Upper Room in each other.” Thinking about your spouse or a close friend, describe the benefits of focusing on the Upper Room and the damage done by connecting from your Lower Room.

- Dr. Crabb writes, “When I believe that you believe I am a good man, I don’t tend toward arrogance or presumption. I rest. And in my rest I am more able to face my Diabolical Self and to then discover and celebrate my Celestial Self. . . . I know of little else so powerful as confessing wretched failing and having a friend look on you with great delight.” Who in your life has offered or offers you this kind of rest? Why do neither arrogance nor presumption tend to result from such acceptance? To whom are you able to offer such delight and acceptance despite a wretchedness that isn’t hidden?
- In spiritual community, Dr. Crabb asserts, “the overriding focus in a spiritual conversation is not sin or psychological damage but the Spirit’s movement. What’s good? What evidence can we find of the Spirit’s creative involvement in each other’s life?” In what upcoming interaction or ongoing relationship will you try to keep this perspective? Start now by considering evidence of the Spirit’s work in his/her life. Write down specifics about what you see.

Because of people in our life who see our Upper Room—who see the healthy tissue mixed in with the bad, the principle of greatness at work even when the principle of wretchedness is far more visible—we can sometimes feel safe. Thanks to how they see me, I more deeply know that I am in Christ and I more fully know that Christ is in me, that beneath every base desire there is a robust appetite for holiness. Only when these truths are positioned in our minds will an overwhelming revelation of the depths of our depravity provoke not despair but worship.

CHAPTER 11

Upper Room Furnishings

- The chapter opens with an invitation to think of someone who right now is worrying you. Dr. Crabb asks you to think truthfully, accurately, realistically. You've seen that person's Lower Room. Were you able, as you did the exercise, to see the Upper Room? Describe that experience—or do the exercise now and comment on the effects of looking for and seeing that person's Upper Room. Who tends to see your Upper Room despite his or her familiarity with your Lower Room? What does that kind of acceptance do for you?
- Review the overview of biblical, covenant history. What new insight—or what new appreciation for knowledge you already had—did you gain from this account?
- What seems to be most overlooked in all the blessings brought on by the New Covenant is that it makes possible a new way to relate. Dr. Crabb lists these four provisions of the covenant:
 - A new purity: We receive forgiveness so complete that it's hard to actually grasp.
 - A new identity: We're now saints who sin, not hopeless sinners.
 - A new inclination: We want to do good.
 - A new power: God's Spirit within us releases the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, enabling us to obey and love.

- If you're a believer, describe your experience of each. If you have not yet committed your life to Christ, which provision is most appealing to you? Why? (Committing your life to Christ requires an acknowledgment of your sinfulness and a request for forgiveness as you name Jesus your Savior and Lord. The prayer can be simple: "Dear God, I realize how much I fall short of Your holiness. . . . I confess my sinfulness . . . and ask Your forgiveness. . . . Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for my sins. I humbly accept that great sacrifice, and, Jesus, I ask You now to be my Savior and my Lord. Amen.")
- The four provisions of the New Covenant correspond to the four furnishings of the Upper Room, which Dr. Crabb identifies as follows:
 1. The renewed image of Christ with its *passion to worship*
 2. A recognition of who we are and who God is that stirs a *passion to trust*
 3. An attitude toward life experiences that views them as an opportunity to satisfy a *passion to grow*
 4. An embracing of God's law as the character of the Person we most love that fuels a *passion to obey*
- Review the descriptions of each passion. What action, statement, and/or attitude during the last week did God call to mind as you read the descriptions of these furnishings either initially or just now? Or, put more simply, which of these passions have you had a taste of in the last week? What prompted that moment of passion? Which passion—to worship, trust, grow, and obey—most regularly guides you? Explain in your own words why each of these passions is valuable to your own walk with the Lord and contributes to spiritual community.
- What do you now more clearly understand about struggles and how best to deal with them? About the role that spiritual community can play in your struggles?

Now turn to “The Tasks of Spiritual Community.” What do you find inviting and especially worthwhile about that description?

In the book of Hebrews, the writer reminds us that the New Covenant is better than the old one in every way. With the blessings of our new purity, our new identity, our new inclinations, and our new power, we can draw near to God and to each other in new ways. And then he instructs us to make sure we keep getting together as a new covenant community and, when we do, to think hard about how we can arouse the passions of the Upper Room, how we can stir each other's desire to love and do good into a consuming fire. So next, in Part III, we will look at what we can do to build spiritual community, to become a community of people on a journey to God that is the safest place on earth for everything good to happen.

PART III

A Way of Relating in This World

CHAPTER 12

Turning Our Souls toward Each Other: Three Fundamental Convictions

- What interferes with your desire to worship, trust, grow, and obey? What interferes with your efforts to do those things?
- The Lower Room is not razed with salvation. Therefore the good passions to worship, trust, grow, and obey are often weak and hard to find. But what indications have you had that those good passions lie within your heart? Your specific evidence may not be as dramatic as the friend with the bad arm, but then again it just might be. “When those passions in me meet those same passions in you,” Dr. Crabb writes, “we experience spiritual community.” Are those indications that good passions exist clearer when you’re with a fellow believer? In worship? If you answered yes, why might that be so?
- This chapter outlines three convictions that need to be believed firmly and strongly if we are to turn our chairs completely enough for our souls to meet. As surely as birds were made to fly and fish to swim, we were made for community, for the kind of community the Trinity enjoys, for *spiritual* community. And to the degree we experience it, we change, we grow, we heal. Foundational Conviction #1 is that spiritual community is the work of the Spirit, not our work. Review the discussion of this conviction. When have you seen—or come closest to seeing—that without the Spirit and the Christ He represents, you can do nothing of real value? And when have you seen in your life or the life of someone

close to you that, as God teaches us to depend on Him, we may struggle for years against small problems but He supplies the power to conquer big problems quickly? Next, our most difficult work in forming spiritual community is to stop working so hard. Why is this difficult? Finally, what role does prayer play in the development of spiritual community?

- Foundational Conviction #2 is that the quality of the energy that comes out of us—energy for good or for bad—depends on our level of fellowship with God. When have you seen the quality of your impact on people be impacted by the degree of your fellowship with God? Give a few specific examples. In light of the personal experiences you just shared, look again at Peter Kreeft's comments. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Then, again, what role does prayer play in the development of spiritual community?
- Foundational Conviction #3 is that having a safe place to own and trace our desires to their source will put us in touch with our hunger for God. Too often the distractions of busyness have sealed us off from what we most desire. Fear can also form a moat around our soul. Does a moat surround your soul? If so, what alligators of distractions and/or addictions have you filled it with? James Houston says, "The unsatisfied longing for God is what drives human beings above all else." Do you agree or disagree? Why? What seems to be driving you? Spend some time considering whether that desire is a meager expression of your deepest desire to know God.

We need a safe place to admit and explore our desires, a community of fellow journeyers who believe that our desires are not at root shameful but thoroughly human and already met in Jesus. We need a place to feel safe enough to meaningfully explore who we are with confidence that the end point would be a joyful meeting with God. These three convictions will help us move toward that goal as we build on them an approach to developing spiritual community.

CHAPTER 13

The Fork in the Road to Spiritual Community

- Review the opening account of a significant interaction that a discouraged Dr. Crabb had with a friend. Look closely at the conversation and Dr. Crabb's analysis of what was happening, what God was doing through his friend. What is striking about the conversation? About the analysis? When has a friend helped you, as C. S. Lewis said, discover God?
- Why is *the passion to celebrate*, which grows out of a New Purity, healing? Put differently, why does an acknowledgment of sin lead to worship? When have you had a taste of this? Who, if anyone, celebrates you—or whom do you celebrate despite an awareness of that person's Lower Room?
- Why is *the passion to envision* passion to control and therefore healing? Explain in your own words why the passion to envision stirs the passion to trust God. When has the experience of finally relinquishing to God your apparent control of something helped you grow in your trust of Him? Be specific. The passion to trust that stirs in each saint, kindled by the provision of a New Identity, translates into the passion to envision what the other is becoming as we journey together. What do you envision for the people you're close to? Who "envisions" for you—and what is that person's impact on

your life? What might it mean to be part of a community of “envisioners”?

- *The passion to discern* arises from the New Covenant gift of a new disposition. When have you found yourself actually preferring holiness . . . feeling a deep passion to grow . . . welcoming trials as a means of spiritual formation? Be specific about each. Why is it healing to view suffering not as an enemy? When have you responded—or seen someone respond—to pain as an opportunity for growth? What growth happened? (It may be too early to answer that question.) What impact did the expectation of or openness to growth have on the person suffering?
- *The passion to empower* represents a movement away from feeling pressure. Why is that movement a step of healing? When have you experienced at least a taste of the passion to obey? The passion to obey excited by the Holy Spirit who is our New Power translates into a passion to give to others whatever the Spirit rouses in us so that they will be further stirred to obey our Lord. We actually present Christ to each other when we freely offer whatever is most spiritually alive in us. When have you been presented with Christ in another person? Describe that experience and how it moved you toward holiness.
- Spiritual community heals the soul by releasing into someone passions that lift that person into the Upper Room. From there, Lower Room passions are exposed for the sin that they are. But those Lower Room passions must be seen before we will disregard them. Only seeing better passions that are solid and noble frees us to recognize evil passions for what they are. In your own words, define the fork in the road, the choice that Dr. Crabb presents here. What fear, hesitation, excitement, and/or anticipation do you feel as you consider choosing being a mystic over being a manager? Be specific—and prayerful.

Spiritual community can be thought of as an exchange between two or more people that reflects four passions: the safety of celebration, the hope of vision, the wisdom of loving discernment, and the power of touch. The community is spiritual if the passions aroused in us as we meet with each other are the direct and supernatural effect of living in the reality of what God has provided in the New Covenant. The fork in the road represents the broad path of continuing on as managers, of trying to develop healing communities while we remain in the Lower Room. It also presents the narrow path of becoming mystics, people who experience the presence and the movement of God within their soul. The rest of the book suggests what is required to choose the path of mysticism.

CHAPTER 14

Managers or Mystics: The Mystery of Community

- A safe community where souls can heal is a community where people look at one another and are stirred by the Spirit to experience holy passions. Out of those passions they speak, and passions are not easily managed. So we put ourselves in the humble position of dependence on God: We become mystics. Dr. Crabb defines *mysticism* as “the felt arousal of spiritual passions within the regenerate heart, passions that can have no existence apart from a Spirit-revealed knowledge of truth and the promptings of the same Spirit to enjoy that truth.” How is this definition different from your earlier understanding of mysticism? What do you find appealing, intriguing, or even threatening about this definition?
- The difficulty is that we’re either managers or bad mystics. We tend to feel all the wrong passions. Dr. Crabb gives a personal example of feeling all the wrong passions. In what recent situation from your own life would you have rather felt the high passions? When was your Diabolical Self—your concern for self, for being in control, for avoiding pain, for succumbing to pressure to do right—released despite perhaps an external appearance of graciousness?
- The starting point for spiritual community to develop is not learning and practicing relational skills; it is relating with God, drawing near to Him through the door opened by the New Covenant. In what ways are you—and/or could you be—taking advantage of the door

opened by the Cross? What, for instance, are you doing to put yourself in a position for learning the humility of giving up power over others?

- The spirituality of a community can be measured not merely by its doctrinal statement but by the passions that are most deeply aroused. Look in the mirror and, whether you answer yes or no, give evidence to support your answer to each of the following questions.
 - Is your passion for worship elbowing out your passion for self?
 - Does your passion to trust nudge aside your passion to control?
 - Does your passion to grow make you willing to suffer whatever pain is needed?
 - Is your passion to obey relieving the pressure to do something right and instead causing you to delight with anything you do right?
 - Are you afraid of mystery?
 - Are you afraid of the Holy Spirit?
- What new perspective on heaven did you gain? And what new or renewed hope for spiritual community do you find in 2 Peter 1:3–4?

At this point, perhaps a model that loosely captures a strategy for becoming a mystical community, for developing the safest place on earth, will help. But first we must make sure we are willing to move toward spiritual community. There is a price.

CHAPTER 15

It's Worth the Risk

- When in your life has it been easier to believe in a watchmaker who started the clock ticking and then backed away than in a sovereign, loving God who could make things better and didn't? And when in your life have you wished you—metaphorically—had never gone to see the doctor, that you had never tried to reveal more of yourself and be more intimate with another person, much less with a community of people?
- Dr. Crabb invites you to look around. Do the happiest people you know seem to be the least involved in substantive, deeply personal community? What do you make of that appearance, of that apparent reality? Why could this be the case?
- Dr. Crabb writes, "The dangers of community seem better to me than the dull safety of independence. Only what is bad is endangered in spiritual community." Based on your growing understanding of spiritual community, identify what that "bad" might be and then explain whether you agree or disagree with this statement and why.
- Dr. Crabb openly shares his fears about his quest for spiritual community, saying that he wonders if his quest is like Dorothy's search for Oz or like Don Quixote's tilting at windmills in a crusade that has no point. Do you have such thoughts about yourself? Equally

as important, do you—having gotten a glimpse of the glories of the temple—share Dr. Crabb’s excitement about what spiritual community could be? What can keep you (and Dr. Crabb) from settling for less?

- In your journey to God, He will take you to a point where a choice among three options must be made—going mad, backing up, or journeying on. Suggest what could prompt a person to make each choice and then list the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Which option are you leaning toward? Why?

In any serious attempt to build true community, we will wrestle with confusion, disappointment, and, occasionally, excruciating agony of soul. Those struggles will compel us to fix our eyes on unseen reality—the Spirit is at work—and to believe in a better day ahead—Christ is coming back.

CHAPTER 16

ENTER, SEE, TOUCH:

A Way of Developing Spiritual Community

- Explain in your own words why spiritual community begins with brokenness.
- Before presenting his vision of the pathway to spiritual community, Dr. Crabb reminds those in spiritual leadership that everything—evangelism, discipleship, youth ministry, *everything*—flows from worship. He also states that he views the preaching/worship service as a preparation for community, as a prelude to journeying more closely together in the right direction. The point of church is journeying together to God. Is yours a worshipping community? If you answer yes, give specific evidence; if you answer no, share your ideas about how your church could be more worshipful. When, if ever, has your experience of worship paved the way for greater intimacy or closer community with a fellow believer?
- Spiritual community is always a miracle. It cannot be programmed into existence. It must be prayed into existence. And we so easily pray for what we know we cannot control and work on what we still think we can control. Summarize the value of prayer and waiting in relation to the development of spiritual community. What lesson does Henri Nouwen draw from the life of Christ? When have your or your church's efforts at ministry and perhaps efforts to develop spiritual community been backward from Christ's

model? What might have been different had you followed His example?

- Spiritual community begins with prayer. The next step involves laying the foundation based on three essential convictions (growth is a mystery; personal holiness counts for more than trained skill; and every felt desire is, at root, a longing for God, though often unrecognized as such) and on a solid grasp of God's truth as revealed in Jesus Christ (truth that gives rise to spiritual passions for worship, trust, growth, and obedience; New Testament truth with its provisions for a new purity, new identity, new disposition, and new power). Review the four numbered statements and the three bulleted points where Dr. Crabb pulls together everything he has said so far in the book. What light bulbs went on for you as you read this section? What excitement was kindled or further inflamed? What will you do with these new insights about, and stirred desires for, spiritual community?
- Enter, see, touch—consider now whether you are ready to take these steps and whether you've already had a taste of what each means.
 - *Enter.* Dr. Crabb will let you into his soul if you are broken yet strong, vulnerable with hope, and respectfully curious. Do you qualify? Be specific. Is there any broken person in your life who feels his/her neediness but whose strength you feel; who always finds a reason to worship God and to celebrate you; and who can say hard things to you and you appreciate it? What enables a person to be like that?
 - *See.* What is the difference between envisioning and discerning, and, in spiritual community, how do the two complement each other? In whom do you see some facet of Christ—and what facet do you see? Who seems to see a facet of Christ in you—and what facet is that? Who in your life seems especially sensitive to the Spirit's present and immediate activity? In what ways do you benefit from contact with that person? When, if ever, has someone commented on God's Spirit at work in or through you?

What kind of community or communion with that person did you sense at the time?

— *Touch.* A wise friend of Dr. Crabb once said, “Christ always leads gently.” Be specific about a time when the Lord clearly but gently led you. When has the Lord clearly led you through a fellow member of Christ’s body? When, if ever, has someone let you know that the Lord used you to lead him/her? How did these experiences affect your relationship with that person?

- If you merely read through the last section of the chapter, this time read the words and then follow the suggestions. If you are not already in a small group, consider your spouse, a prayer partner, or a close friend whom you see regularly as you work through the four steps.

Spiritual community develops as the passions of God’s Spirit, aroused by the truth of the gospel, begin to flow between people as they relate. Don’t stop getting together, and when you are together, think hard about how to stimulate one another to love and do good deeds. It’s time to turn our chairs toward one another.

CHAPTER 17

Becoming Spiritual Community

- When have God’s people—or one of God’s people—been a rock in stormy seas for you? What impact did that experience have on you—on your faith, your pain, your circumstances, your strength? What if you had been able to turn to a genuine spiritual community as defined by Dr. Crabb in this book?
- Define what you understand Dr. Crabb to mean by the phrase “spiritual direction.” How is that different from what modern psychology offers?
- Competence to care for souls and to cure them, to nurture the work of the Spirit in another’s life, depends first on spiritual maturity, on the depth of the helper’s communion with God. Who in your life might qualify for this role? When have you worked with—or when have you considered working with—a counselor or therapist? What problem or pain were you facing? Was the psychological problem fundamentally a spiritual one? What would a spiritual director have offered that you didn’t receive or wouldn’t have received?
- Read Maria’s story again. In your own words explain how she would benefit from the guidance of a spiritual director and from involvement in a genuine spiritual community.

- Now look at your own life. How would it be different if you were involved in a genuine spiritual community? What will you do to find a spiritual community like the one Dr. Crabb has been describing?

The church needs many things. It will properly prioritize its needs only when it gets its purpose straight. Its purpose is to draw people into Christ, to mirror Christ to one another, to show Christ to others by the way we live. That happens only in a community of people on a journey to God, only in a group of people who turn their chairs toward each other. If such a community is appealing to you, Dr. Crabb invites you to join him in prayer to hear the mind of God, to see what He would have you do. The church is a community of spiritual friends and spiritual directors who journey together to God. We must become that community. Prayer is the starting point.