

SGC Leadership Meeting with Dr. Larry Crabb
April 10, 2004

GLN opening remarks:

Sustained isolation is probably one of the worst fates to befall a human being.

To be alive and yet emotionally alone is a hell on earth.

“Judy Bucknell was murdered on a steamy June 9th evening.

She kept a diary.

If she had not, no one would have known of her loneliness.

In those diaries she created a character and a voice.

The character was herself and the voice was yearning.

Judy had failed to connect – many lovers, much love offered, but not returned.

Her diary was filled with words like:

- ‘Where are the men who would like to share more than my bed?’
- I would like to have, once in my life, the kind of sex that included love.

She never did.

- She was not a prostitute
- Never on drugs
- Never went to jail
- Not a social outcast.

- She was respectable
- She jogged
- She hosted parties
- She wore designer clothes
- And she had an apartment that overlooked the bay.

AND SHE WAS VERY, VERY LONELY.

She wrote, “I see people together and I am so jealous that I want to throw up. What about me? What about me?”

In her diary she wrote, “Who is going to love Judy Bucknell? I feel so old, unloved, unwanted, abandoned, and used up. I want to cry and sleep forever.” (From Miami Herald in Max Lucato, No Wonder They Call Him Jesus)

Every one of us wants at least three things:
to belong
to matter
to know the future

Look with me please at Paul’s words in Philippians 1:27-28:
“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God.

But instead of offering the real thing, the world offers counterfeits to really belonging and to truly mattering.

And in our sinful self-centeredness we readily cooperate with the world’s counterfeits:

We try to “belong,” oddly enough, through individualism, independence – not needing anybody.

And we try to matter by doing.

But belonging through individualism is an oxymoron and significance through productivity is a black hole – it will take all you can produce and demand more.

Many of us come to the church sensing a need for something different in relationships but looking for it in all the same counterfeits.

We bump along through church relationships like billiard balls – touching but never connecting – speaking but never relating.

We discover that the only way we are accepted is if we are independent enough to not really need anyone.

And we discover that we matter only as long as we produce – and so we produce: we teach, we sing, we committee, we show up.

But we are still alone and we don't really matter apart from our productivity.

Who are the people who will truly know me and still fully love me?

You say, "God does!"

And I say that is definitely a theological truth but it becomes a practical reality in the context of the body of Christ – the church.

Paul Tournier wrote, "There are two things you cannot do alone. One is to be married and the other is to be a Christian."

I contend that, here and now, the way we experience that we belong and that we matter is in relationship with Christ in his people.

While I disagree with a misuse of the statement, I think I understand better than ever before what church leaders meant hundreds of years ago when they said, "There is no salvation outside the church."

I love the title of a new book:

With apologies to Senator Clinton, the book is titled, It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian.

The church is God's means of accomplishing God's purposes in our lives.

And by the church I mean the people of God – you and me.

It is the truth of the Word of God, through the power of the Spirit of God in the love of the people of God that, as Paul said it, "Christ is formed in you."

- It is here, in relationship with each other, that we should experience that we truly belong.

Not because we are independent and not needy but precisely because we ARE dependent and needy AND we are family.

- And it is here that we should experience that we are loved unconditionally.

Not because we can produce, but because we are made in the image of God.

“A spiritual community, a church, is full of broken people who turn... toward each other because they know they cannot make it alone. These broken people journey together with their wounds and worries and washouts visible, but are able to see beyond the brokenness to something alive and good, something whole” (in each other by God’s grace.) Crabb p32

I don’t want any of us or any of the people we serve to be the next Judy Bucknell, who died alone.

I don’t want anyone to be alone in the midst of 1200 others.

I want every man, woman and child to know, without even thinking about it, that here they belong,
not because they are independent and not a burden on anyone but because they are family – a brother or sister in the Lord.

And I want them to know that they matter.

Not because they can help us achieve our objectives as an organization by their abilities or their money, but simply because they are one of us.

But it is more than just people feeling good about themselves and others.

God has created us and called us to reflect his character, to bear his image.

Paul said it this way, in a text I preached so recently:

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹

filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--
to the glory and praise of God.

For nearly two years we have been praying, thinking and talking about what it means to love each other, what it means to be the church, a true spiritual community.

Today it is our privilege to have with us a man who has been in the forefront of praying and thinking about “spiritual community.”

His recent books have greatly influenced our thinking.

This man has not only been reading and writing on the subject but has, with his wife, been attempting to live it out in their relationships with others.

We have invited him to be here today to help us “flesh out” this crucial idea, to help us to see better what “spiritual community” actually looks like.

Please join me in welcoming professor, author, lecturer, father, husband and most importantly, fellow-Pilgrim on the same journey, Dr. Larry Crabb.