

Review of *Hunger for Healing*¹ by Keith Miller

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Summary

From the Preface to the Appendix's, the author is confessional in his approach to the widely acclaimed "12-Steps" of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). He attempts to answer the question of "Why would a seriously committed Christian write a book about the Twelve Steps as a means of spiritual growth for Christians." What transpires in the book is a chapter-by-chapter evaluation of each step with Scripture and some theology to bridge the gap of integrating this secular therapy into a Christian spiritual discipline.

The author then attempts to take each "Step" and discuss Christian applications, including a work-through process and exercises at the end of each chapter. In these exercises, the individual takes what has been taught in the previous chapter and works through the specific step in a journal-type confessional. Each chapter has 1-10 different thought-provoking questions intended to help the Christian walk out the "12-Steps" as a therapeutic process. An accompanying workbook is available to supplement the material the author outlines in the chapters.

Miller does a great job breaking down each step and applying it to his own life, and his confessional and shepherding heart is clearly in each line of the book. This book is designed as a life-long process that gently guides the individual through change utilizing the foundational blocks of the 12-Step system. With a strong basis of the psychological, Miller stresses that recovery is all about taking care of self, loving self, and being good to self, and that it's available to everyone.

Evaluation

I thought a strong point of the text was the author's attempt to integrate a secular therapy into a Christian spiritual discipline. However I also think that this is a major weakness. I think the best place to start in an evaluation of any "recovery movement" curriculum for the church is to ask the following questions:

¹ Miller, Keith. *Hunger for Healing: The Twelve Steps as a Classic Model for Christian Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

1. Does it point people to admit without reservation that they are sinners, and that they should therefore be separated from God's presence forever? Does it acknowledge that they are in rebellion against God, either consciously or unconsciously, and that they deserve not grace but judgment (Isa. 53:4-6; Rom 1:18-32; 3:10-19,23; 5:6-11; Gal. 3:19-29; 1 John 1:10)?
2. Does it remind us that the point to becoming a Christian is to believe that God loves you in spite of your sin, and that he has acted in Jesus Christ to remove that sin and to begin to make you perfect once more by conforming you to Christ's image (Rom 5:8; John 1:9-13; 3:16; 6:47; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 10:9-10; Rev. 3:20)?
3. Is there an act by which they actually commit themselves to Christ? Or, to put it another way, is there an act by which they open the gate of their heart and admit him? This does not mean that they are responsible for their own salvation. If they do open the door, it is only because Christ is there beforehand moving them to do it. Still, from their own point of view, the act itself is absolutely indispensable (Matt. 7:21-29; Luke 6:46-49; 14:25-35; John 6:44,64-65; Rom. 8:26-39; 1 John 1:5-10).
4. Is there a beginning and end to the process? Jesus died on the cross to give us victory and set the captive's free (recovered) versus recovery. When one goes to the hospital, how long is the healing process? There comes a point when many people abandon the recovery process, such as when it becomes too expensive. Being self-absorbed in perpetually aiding those who are recovering is selfishness and not ministry.

Reflection

I am constantly amazed that Christians believe that AA has Christian roots (<http://www.pamweb.org/crit12steps.html>), and that without real investigation they allow it to move into the body without verifying the theology against Scripture. Such is often the case with another movement today: psychology. Although Miller claims that he is pointing the individual to strong Christian foundations, each step is based on secular psychological theories. Sprinkling Scriptures throughout a secular program does not create a "Christian" product. For each chapter, I was flabbergasted that I was asked to look deeply into my past and spend time looking at my sin and reliving it, writing it out, analyzing it and swimming in it. This is a direct conflict with Scripture:

But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Eph. 4:20-25).

I am not saying that there are not consequences for my sin, but I am a new creation in Christ, right? Jesus died to impute his righteousness to me, and I am now justified. I am amazed that this redemptive message is missing even in “Christian” recovery programs.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

In conclusion, I would like to add a quote from my own tradition and from an article that tie in my reflections in a succinct manner. First, the quote from the article: “We must evaluate the supposed ‘good works’ done by AA from God’s perspective and not according to some pragmatic argument from the results,”² which cannot be verified. (See my article titled, “AA Attendance Summary” for more resources and how to disciple away from AA.³)

Second, the quote from my tradition:

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others (2 Kings 10:30-31; 1 Kings 21:27,29; Phil. 1:15-16,18): yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith (Gen. 4:5; Heb. 11:4,6); nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word (1 Cor. 13:3, Isa. 1:12); nor to a right end, the glory of God (Matt. 6:2,5,16), they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God (Hag. 2:14; Tit. 1:15; Amos 5:21-22; Hos. 1:4; Rom. 9:16; Tit. 3:5).

² Christopher H. Wisdom. “Alcoholics Autonomous: A Biblical Critique of AA’s View of God, Man, Sin, and Hope” in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume VIII, Number 2, 1986.

³ <http://home.comcast.net/~mnccounselor/AA%20Attendance%20Summary.pdf>.

And yet, their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing unto God (Ps. 14:4; 36:3; Job 21:14-15; Matt. 25:41-43,45; 23:23).⁴

⁴*The Westminster Confession of Faith: An Authentic Modern Version*. Rev. EPC ed. Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1985.