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12 Miracles of Spiritual Growth: A Path to Healing from the Gospels

E. Kent Rogers
Swedenborg Foundation Press (May 2012)
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After reading deeply into the New Testament Gospels, E. Kent Rogers began to find that Jesus's miracles were speaking to modern-day problems on many levels. With this guidebook for group study, he discusses twelve of these messages. First, the relevant Bible passage is quoted in its entirety, then Rogers expands upon it. In a story from the book of Matthew, in which Jesus heals a woman's daughter, he points out that for such a woman to even approach him was risky. Being female and the mother of a disabled child were both considered marks against her. Jesus insults and dismisses her twice, forcing the woman to stand her ground before he heals her child. Rogers interprets the healing as extending from the child to the mother, because she was healed of her sense of unworthiness. The discussion is followed by a guided meditation, along with "Leaves" (affirmations inspired by the story), "Fruit" (a list of activities designed to help you put the teaching into daily practice), and discussion questions.

The book's format and structure should make it useful to Christian discussion groups. It's nondenominational and could appeal to non-Christians as well, but for the occasional discussion that may lose those outside the faith (for example, the notion that addiction and personal upset can be blamed on external, seemingly literal, demons). There are many references to twelve-step recovery programs; those who appreciate that approach will enjoy the book, while others may feel left out. Rogers can retell a Bible story with clarity and heart, drawing the reader in. But that connection is sometimes challenged by an over-reliance on acronyms to stand in for concepts he wants to promote. "EMPOWERED" is a long word; taken letter by letter as an action plan to heal from "Legion" (those demons again), it gets burdensome.

Close to the end of the book, there's a discussion of heaven and hell that is beautiful and radical in its simple kindness and plausibility. Fittingly positioned in a chapter about resurrection from spiritual death, it alters this book from functional to downright page-turning. Rogers runs an orphanage in Nepal, and shares just one story about his time there in an explanation of the book's cover photo. He's a great storyteller, and this simple anecdote is immediately absorbing in a way the discussion of miracles is not. One wonders what the book would read like with real-life examples buttressing those chapters. That said, the book will find an appreciative audience among those looking for a group workbook that can easily align with recovery literature.

HEATHER SEGGEL (April 23, 2012)

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