

It's Always the Heart

Arthur E. Constantine

WestBow Press (May 29, 2014)

Softcover \$11.95 (112pp)

978-1-4908-2941-8

Clarity and conviction make this guide to heart health through spiritual practice a convincing read.

Physical health and spiritual wellbeing are often treated as two entirely separate subjects, but Tennessee-based cardiologist Arthur E. Constantine believes they are related much more than most people believe. In his trim but compelling book, *It's Always the Heart*, the physician argues that development of spiritual fitness is just as important as any exercise regimen or whole-foods diet.

Through a collection of patients' stories that underscore his point, Constantine artfully describes both the clinical and spiritual aspects of each case. He offers his opinion on the benefit of spiritual focus to the heart in particular, an organ that he notes is mentioned in the Bible more than seven hundred times. "Just as the heart is the most important organ in our physical bodies for life on earth, it is the most important organ in our spiritual lives and life everlasting in heaven," he writes, adding that God communicates to people through their hearts, which means a strong spiritual practice must include a receptive heart.

Constantine delivers his ideas with straightforward clarity and enormous conviction, but where the book shines most is in the patients' stories, where the doctor is able to turn experience into epiphany. For instance, the book's title derives from an encounter with a new patient, a man so haughty that the doctor nicknames him "Mr. Important." Although he describes several symptoms of heart disease, the patient posits that his problem may be due to too much spicy food or stress from rushing to crucial business meetings. "More than twenty-five years of practicing cardiology had taught me that especially in the case of personalities like Mr. Important, it's always the heart," he writes.

In that particular example, and in many others throughout the book, Constantine is able to diagnose physical issues before they become terminal, but he's also adept at articulating spiritual problems as well. When it comes to patients like Mr. Important—and others who have hardened their spiritual and corporeal hearts—simply providing medical interventions will only bring partial relief if they don't develop their faith in conjunction with making better lifestyle choices.

In tying together medical and spiritual aspects of cardiac care, the author provides an intriguing hypothesis about the roots of health. Although his work will appeal most strongly to a Christian audience, Constantine's theory that there is more to heart health than diet and exercise (although he advocates plenty of both) makes a fascinating entry point into discussions about what really constitutes true wellness.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (June 19, 2014)

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