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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ RELIGION

Living on Life's Edge without Going over It

Donna M. Dean
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“I heard once we must go to a house of mourning so we can go to the house of praise,” writes Donna Dean in *Living on Life’s Edge Without Going Over It*. Dean certainly understands pain and mourning, but she also knows heartfelt rejoicing, as experienced through God’s presence, peace, and deliverance in her dark times. By sharing her experiences and the lessons learned, she offers a series of devotions to encourage others facing difficult circumstances.

Dean’s accounts include her husband’s serious truck accident, which had a devastating financial impact, her son’s bike mishap that broke his jaw, her daughter’s sickness while pregnant, and her own abuse-based emotional issues. But through all of the adversity, Dean’s faith deepened and she realized that God had not abandoned her and was truly the source of strength and hope she needed. “God taught me to take one day at a time and not to look at the circumstance.”

Dean focuses each devotional on a particular type of heart, such as a joyful heart, a thankful heart, and a forgiving heart. She recounts a portion of her life’s story in each chapter and relates it to a scripture verse. Between the chapters, she also inserts peaceful pictures or a brief chorus written by herself or a family member.

But despite Dean’s candid recollections and upbeat focus, her book has numerous flaws. The main drawback is the overall format of the book. A typical devotion format includes a key Bible verse and then a story, teaching, or explanation that encourages the reader to ponder or meditate on the subject to gain new insight. However, because Dean gives only a part of her testimony in each devotion, she does not challenge the reader to a deeper understanding or a desire to contemplate the verse further.

Many of her stories are redundant or without a focused takeaway. For example, several chapters have some degree of reference to family health issues, money problems, or feelings of loneliness and depression. They are all valid topics, but each should have been covered in an individual devotional that would relate to the verse and make a thought-provoking point.

A thorough editing of the manuscript would have also been beneficial in establishing good reading flow and sentence structure. Too often the wording is awkward or confusing, as is the case with this example: “God did meet my needs. It hurts a lot to see him unable to do anything. He suffers so much.”

Another problem is the book’s lack of sufficient content. There are only twelve devotionals, whereas most devotional books have a minimum of thirty. Each devotion’s concluding material, which is intended to cause reflection, gives no guidance to help the reader. Dean’s life story could have easily been condensed into a short booklet or pamphlet and been more compelling. By breaking it up into stand-alone devotions, the story as a whole is not as powerful.

Dean’s passionate faith and understandably joyful message is evident in her writing. She sees God working in her life in both good and bad times, and she wants to encourage others so they don’t go over the edge.
JEFF FRIEND (October 5, 2012)

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