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Body, Mind & Spirit

Running in Circles: How False Spirituality Traps Us in Unhealthy Relationships
Kim V. Engelmann
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Engelmann, currently the Pastor of Congregational Care at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, received her Doctorate of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care from Boston University School of Theology. With this book, Engelmann introduces readers to the concept of "hamster wheel suffering," the phrase she uses to describe the thoughts and behaviors of those stuck in an emotional rut or life situation from which they are unable to escape. The idea is that placing too much effort in pushing something that refuses to budge, a person depletes the energy necessary to either improve or escape from a negative situation. As Engelmann says, "When we're in the hamster wheel, we continually find ourselves right back where we started… [b]ut it's not so obvious to us. We think we're being diligent and intense in our endurance of difficulty, but in the end we go absolutely nowhere."

Some may find the title of this book misleading: "false spirituality" does not mean no spirituality, and most of the author's arguments are rooted in Scripture. Readers of strong Christian faith will find the book helpful in identifying those behaviors or circumstances that need drastic rethinking: in this, Engelmann acts as a close friend, and her warmth feels thoughtful and unwavering. Pointing out the importance of point of view in feelings of victimization, she says, "In order to move vertically, we must be willing to reach out for another person's perspective. We have to realize that we're wearing ourselves out on a problem that has no solution from within the maze."

Readers may also be surprised to find that a large part of the book is autobiographical; many fascinating pages are written in a strong narrative style that, at times, begs for a re-categorization to memoir. But Engelmann deftly uses her hurtful past as a thread of illustration throughout the text, and often these experiences capstone the articulation of an especially elusive analogy or concept. The book contains at least one factual error—the movie, "Awakenings" was based on the book of the same name by Oliver Sacks (1973), not one of

Sacks' later works as the author states. But the prose is often beautifully written and there are several gems of wisdom that will surprise and delight. As the author states (referring to the words of Jesus), "these words promise us a resurrection morning, the healing of our brokenness and a chance to stop running in circles." Strongly recommended for Christian bookstores and other venues where Scriptural references are anticipated.

Traci Avet