Clarion Review

Religion

The Depth of Grace: Finding Hope at Rock Bottom

J. Bronson Haley
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Four Stars (out of Five)

J. Bronson Haley is a believer, and *The Depth of Grace* explains why. “No matter how deep you’ve fallen into the pit,” he promises, “God’s grace can reach down and pull you out.” He considers himself a prime example of a serious sinner who has been saved, and his book is a heartfelt attempt to spread the word about Jesus Christ to others in need.

A disturbing childhood featuring alcoholic parents is only the start of Haley’s problems. Motivated by the helplessness he feels in witnessing his violent stepfather repeatedly abuse his mother, he eventually assumes the role of protector of the underdog. Loyal to a fault, willing to fight on behalf of anyone he believes needs his help, he earns a reputation as a tough street fighter before he completes middle school. Suffering his own “emptiness and pain on the inside,” he soon adds drinking and partying to his fighting ways, finding himself “a full-blown alcoholic by the age of fifteen,” and it gets worse from there. Haley’s lifestyle promises one thing: trouble. He experiences plenty of it, often with serious—and sometimes tragic—consequences.

Haley’s stories are outlandish in the telling, yet sobering for the reader, as he claims that all of them are true. In short, he has done some very stupid, dangerous things. He believes now that surviving a near-fatal car accident during his junior year of high school was a clear indication that God was saving him “for higher things,” but he was not able to overcome his challenges at that time. More years of “screwing up”—and a horrific drug addiction—were to come, before he could finally accept the message that God was sending him. “I was very sick, physically and spiritually,” he admits. For Haley, accepting Jesus—being born again and believing in the Word of God—engendered a complete turnaround, and the freedom he now feels is what he wants to share with and wishes for his readers.

The Depth of Grace will appeal to Christians and anyone else open to accepting what

Haley describes as “the resurrection power” of Jesus Christ. Nonbelievers are not likely to be moved, although the desperation of hitting rock bottom has been known to motivate many a sinner. A fine storyteller, Haley shares his escapades with a sense of both wonder and horror, as if even he cannot believe his own past. Personable and often funny, he is nonetheless dead serious in his message about Jesus, and his intent is not to draw attention to himself, but rather to spread the Word of God. Scattered among the chapters about his own exploits, he offers “Rest Stops,” which are separate chapters about the Bible and its relevance to modern-day life. Haley explains various passages in understandable terms, and he draws parallels between stories in the Bible and more contemporary circumstances, including his own.

Through his candid, down-home style and confessional “sinner” persona, Haley is clearly preaching his own version of God’s Word. While hearts “begin to swell” rather too often in *The Depth of Grace*, those receptive to seeking solace and help through Jesus are likely to find much to ponder in its pages.

Cheryl Hibbard