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ST310: God & Humanity: Foundations of Counseling

Book Review: Allender, *The Healing Path*

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Dan B. Allender's *The Healing Path: How the Hurts in Your Past Can Lead You to a More Abundant Life* explores how deep suffering and loss can shape the believer's spiritual formation to show a greater hope and love in Jesus. Allender is a well-known counselor who works in the pastoral counseling realm where he states that recovering from trauma is very disconnected from sanctification in the Christian life.¹ The thesis of this book is that healing cannot come from escaping one's pain but rather from facing it head-on with *integrity* and *expectation* that God redeems our broken storylines and brings them into Christ's redeeming storyline.² Allender's view that human pain is involved in the story of redemption brings new meaning to suffering for Christ and to what may seem like valleys too deep to tread. One must go through the valleys and not around them, because God uses the valleys to build endurance and faithfulness in His children.³

Allender structures the healing path in a tri-fold manner. Betrayal, powerlessness, and ambivalence are his central categories for the Christian's struggles.⁴ He states that these experiences tend to distort one's desire for God and others, defying the first and second greatest commandments. Betrayal of one's trust shows one that he is limited and dependent in some way, which can show the need for Jesus. Powerlessness felt in the loss of something brings about grief, which allows one to face truth, including in their relationships with God. The healing path

¹ Dan B. Allender, *The Healing Path: How the Hurts in Your Past Can Lead You to a More Abundant Life* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1999), 13-14.

² Ibid., 26-27.

³ Ibid., 45.

⁴ Ibid., 57-70.

is the revelation of truth, whether that be truth of dependence on God, sins overlooked, or things previously unknown in relationships. This healing path is transformative, as Allender puts it, and help a person become more capable of “courageous hope” and “vulnerable love.”⁵ Allender’s distinct style of the healing path provides a risky, but truthful movement towards God with all of one’s brokenness. Allender then reassures the reader that the risks are worth it because God is the Great Physician and will not fail us.⁶ The healing that comes after the brokenness is even more stable and sure in the Lord and therefore can propel one to develop deeper relationships with other Christians and ultimately, the Lord Himself.

One thing that I found interesting about Allender’s approach is his emphasis on story and narrative. He writes that God does not move on from our brokenness but rather uses it and integrates it into His redemption narrative.⁷ What a beautiful thing to read. It has made me think a lot about sanctification and how it is so connected to our hurts and sins, but still beautiful and freeing as we run away from sin and toward holiness in the Lord. Our killing of sin is not once-for-all like Jesus’s death was and is. Our killing of sin is a daily struggle of giving our sins and pain to the Lord and facing it head-on. However, Jesus’s death and our struggles with sin have one thing in common: they are embodied in the very physical nature God created. Jesus physically wept, bled, and died fully as a human (and fully divine), and we weep, bleed, and die to the flesh to emulate Christ, be united with Him, and fill up what is lacking in His afflictions. This framework is tested as biblical, and makes the theology and Scripture, previously merely understood, now *lived out*.

⁵ Ibid., 112-115.

⁶ Ibid., 147-148.

⁷ Ibid., 166-167.

Allender's *Healing Path* is full of theological richly thought through and lived out, but I continue to think through his analogy of hope and faith to "risk." He writes that to hope is to risk again after disappointment.⁸ The goal he has in mind is admirable and pure it seems, but I wonder the repercussions of framing hope as a "risk." Is it a true risk, in the way that the word is commonly used in the English language, might not best represent the term of "hope" as it is described in the Scriptures. Risk implies that there is some uncertainty and the Christian should be certain, or rather, have hope in the "things unseen." The Lord is not a risk. He is the true and certain way to salvation and healing. Further, this framework can make having courage to face your past a human achievement rather than God's work, but Allender provides a multitude of evidence to guard against this.⁹ The cultivation of hope in one's life might be better described as primarily from the Holy Spirit. However, despite the possible lack of clarity in the vocabulary used for nuanced theology of the healing path, this book is incredibly invaluable and seems to be the gold standard for Christ-centered trauma healing. His healing path is a strong argument for being intentional to cultivate a bold trust and hope in the Lord's work in one's life after trauma.

The Great Physician has so many intentions in His conversation with the woman at the well in John 4, and for Christian counselors to be able to replicate that in even a minor way, is a great blessing to the Church and Kingdom-expansion. It carefully combines deep ancient theology and the newer biblical-based counseling methods to give the Christian with a traumatic past a way forward in the Lord. This book also does not ignore emotions. It is realistic for a pastor to read this book and see himself and his congregants in the situations presented. It is a book that both counselors and pastors could use to improve their counseling methods to be more biblical. Seminary students and avid theological readers would enjoy this light book as well.

⁸ Ibid., 135-159.

⁹ Ibid., 148-149.

Lastly, any Christian who cannot make sense of the intersection between their past and their faith, or any Christian who feels they he or she cannot move forward in their walk with the Lord, should read this book fervently and go back and reference it over the years to remember the Great Physician who heals His children.