Wounds come with life, wherever you are and whatever you do, and cross-cultural ministry is no exception. The worst hurts go deeper than skin and bone. They wither the heart, poison treasured relationships, or curse us with such fear that any “next step” seems impossible. Charles Kraft’s insightful book is a thoroughly practical and integrated approach to the question of what to do about these wounds.

The popular term for this subject is *inner healing*. Kraft has no quarrel with this descriptor, which helpfully differentiates emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing from *outer*, or physical, healing. He prefers to call it *deep-level healing*, in distinction from *surface-level healing*. Outward, obvious symptoms (whether physical or emotional) often have roots in painful, damaging experiences that have been buried deeply. Never having been processed in a healthy way, these hidden hurts may lead to a variety of apparently unrelated behavioral and even physical problems. Kraft stresses that such a condition impairs a person’s God-given freedom to make responsible, wise and loving choices.

There is a wide variety of philosophies of cause and treatment when it comes to psychological trouble. I have limited training and experience in counseling, but Kraft’s approach strikes me as holistic and integrative. He emphasizes the linkages between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual realities in a person’s life. A particular symptom or set of them may have one primary root, or several interacting causes and effects. Kraft does not argue that all mental-health issues have a spiritual basis. Neither does he advocate the other extreme, that all psychological ills are purely biological or cognitive-behavioral in nature.

The belief that demons – evil spirits – can sometimes be actively involved in exploiting and exacerbating inner wounds is one of the themes in this book. For some readers this may be unsettling, or may even be grounds to dismiss the contents out of hand. What demons can or cannot do, especially in relation to believers, is a subject on which Christians often disagree. Kraft did mission work in northern Nigeria and has traveled widely. His interaction with cultures for which spiritual realities are significant probably influenced him to widen his worldview horizons beyond the material boundaries espoused by many other Westerners. Kraft brings this broadened perspective together with the Biblical accounts of God the Creator and a variety of other spiritual beings that act in human affairs. This is the synthesis that informs Kraft’s understanding of deep-level hurts and what to do about them. In the final chapter of the book, he discusses issues related to the activity of demons in relation to Christian believers and briefly explains his view of Biblical principles for recognizing and addressing these spiritual challenges.
I would identify three aspects of this book that have been most helpful to me in dealing with my own inner hurts and those of family members and friends. First, the author focuses consistently on the Biblical foundation of our identity in Christ, on the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer, and on the basic practices of healthy discipleship as comprising a core strategy for effective deep-level healing. Although Kraft acknowledges the possibility of activity by evil spirits, they neither fascinate him nor steal the lime-light. One of the key analogies in the book is the association of rats with garbage; getting rid of spiritual trash is the best way to keep clear of the “unclean” spirits that like the stuff. A basic assumption is that God strongly desires to heal deep hurts, and a corollary is that we may expect him actively to direct the process as we ask.

Second, the author respects the role of standard psychotherapeutic care as part of holistic deep-level healing. He acknowledges that inner wounds may be sufficiently serious and complex to require the intervention of a qualified professional. It is important when seeking to help troubled persons to discern when it may be necessary to refer them to someone with the specific training to address their needs. My own family – all but one of us TCKs – has been greatly helped through the ministries of both professional counselors and also spiritually wise brothers and sisters with no formal therapeutic credentials.

Third, there is a wealth of practical, step-by-step advice on how to address the spiritual aspects of various kinds of deep-level healing. In part one, Kraft provides orientation material for those who minister, a general procedural framework for deep-level healing, and a section on helpful techniques. Part two focuses on issues and problems in inner healing, and gives special attention to unhealthy reactions to traumas, to self-image issues, to past wounds that linger and fester, and to loss resulting from death and divorce. Two final chapters address the special challenges of dissociative disorders and situations involving overt demonic activity.

One may not agree with all of Professor Kraft’s perspectives or with every technique he uses toward the healing of the wounds in people’s souls. Much of what he offers in this book, however, can be of significant value to readers who need help for their own inner hurts, and who would like to do more to help others who struggle too. Those of us who have served cross-culturally, in particular, I think are likely to appreciate and to make use of Kraft’s insights.

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