

Book review on type of book self-help

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Book Review - How to Be a People Helper

General Subject Matter: Biblical Self-Help

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In *How to Be a People Helper*, Collins (1995) seeks to use Biblical principles and acts of kindness and consideration in order to increase our sensitivity to others' needs. In writing this book, Collins hopes to inspire paraprofessionals (those who are not experts or professionally trained, but have taken workshops or have some experience in Biblical counseling) to have the tools to effectively help others. The book is also written from the perspective of these paraprofessionals, in order to provide information as to how to relate to others and find ways within their canon of resources to help them. This book falls into the general field of Biblical or pastoral counseling; essentially, they are like self-help books, but they teach the reader how to help others, using a Biblical framework as its basis.

Collins writes the book in a semi-informal way; the book is not full of heady language, as it is meant for relative laymen to understand and absorb. The text is very coherent and clear, with simple sentences that are very concise and fluid; at the same time, he never talks down to his audience. The book itself is divided into chapters relating different aspects of 'people helping': Techniques, direction, helping as a paraprofessional, helping in times of desperation and in different contexts (on the phone, crisis mode, in the church). Each different context is given its own chapter, as a different set of circumstances relates to each aspect of people helping. The final chapter, "

Helping Yourself," allows all of the techniques you learned to help others to be applied to your own life, giving you a better idea of how to better yourself given all of the information you have accumulated thus far from the book.

The theme of Collins' book relates to the ability of paraprofessionals to provide effective Christian counseling, despite not having an immense amount of professional training. With some effective strategies, and knowledge of the right passages to cite, the helper/helped relationship can come to a positive effect on both peoples' lives. The helped gets needed counsel regarding times of crisis and general loss of direction, and the helper can rest easy knowing that they have effectively counselled. The thesis of the book is that, despite not being a professional counselor, Christian paraprofessionals can definitely make positive changes in someone's life, and effectively counsel through the proper use of these Biblical passages and techniques.

Collins often uses down-to-earth, relatable stories to start off the concept of his passages. For example, the final chapter, " Helping Yourself," kicks off the theme by telling a story about a restaurant stay he had. One rude waiter ignored his request for a refill because he had people to wait on, which a friend was indignant about since he was " a people, too" (p. 193). This was used to introduce the concept that sometimes, we ignore that the helper is a person as well, and not a magical objective source of wisdom. Often, the helper needs a bit of help too; this concept is introduced thoroughly through these attention-grabbing techniques.

Once these basic concepts are delivered, then the Scriptural basis for helping others (or ourselves) is laid bare; passages from Psalms and other books are provided and placed in the context for helping others. For example, Psalm 119 is used to examine our own Scriptural needs: " Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord How can a young man keep his way pure? By living it according to your Word." (vv. 1, 9). " (p. 196). In essence, this passage denotes that we should always live according to Biblical structures and tenets, which is the basis for helping yourself.

The biggest benefit to this book comes through its essential perspective: that counseling is, at its heart, 'people helping.' Putting it in this light makes it a much less daunting task to consider oneself a Biblical counselor, as people help each other all the time. However, in order to be a disciple, Collins has six principles of discipleship counseling that should be adhered to as a skilled pastoral counselor: helpers are builders of relationships, helpees must forge a relationship with their helper, helpers must focus on the behavior and emotions of the helpee, the helper must have many skills in their toolset, and helpees must be turned into further disciples (p. 57).

With these aspects, a process of helping is reached, and a favorable result (turning those who need help into those who can also help others) can be attained. There are many different types of helping that are covered in the book - not only are people in a crisis in need of help, but there are many who need preventative helping. These preventative measures come from the formation of a community who can offer unconventional support to others.

Preventative measures include premarital counseling and other techniques which " arrest or stop problems before they get worse" (p. 178).

One of the biggest problems with this book comes from one of its greatest strengths: despite its brevity and its ability to be applicable to ordinary situations, it is surprisingly light on detail. Often, the book relies on common-sense concepts far too often; while it can be helpful to point these out, it may be more helpful to bring more pastoral or counseling theory into the mix. For example, I could learn more than just " to accept yourself" (p. 198); I wanted to learn how to do this in greater detail than just writing down adjectives that describe you, which I felt was a bit simplistic and would not lead to a magical understanding of yourself.

Also, while I found the personal stories helpful sometimes, Collins often incorporated them too much into his writing. At times, Collins would seem to be talking directly about himself and less in the collective 'we' sense; it would help to relate the contents of the book more to a general audience if it didn't feel like Collins' autobiography at times. I feel as though the book could benefit more from external sources (besides Scripture); Collins relies primarily on the Word of God, which he should; however, using his framework alone makes for suspiciously light bases for actual counseling strategies.

In terms of my personal experience, the book proved to be very helpful. Often, I feel as though I have sufficient will and desire to help others in a Biblical sense, but I do not have the means, or could benefit from specific strategies. There have been many times when people have come to me in

crisis, and I have done my best to help them - with this in mind, I want to be as well-equipped to guide them in a positive way. I wish to enhance my own sense of Biblical counseling; this provides a nice, semi-layman's view on how to help others. Its use of concrete strategies and unique Biblical passages help me to solidify a strategy to help others. In this way, I would say it has accomplished its goal of educating the paraprofessional in Biblical counseling practice, and I would recommend it to others.

In conclusion, *How to Be a People Helper* contains some essentially useful strategies for those who wish to help others in a Biblical sense. Collins uses personal stories to good effect, for the most part, and the language is never out of reach for a layman. However, it does suffer from that lack of detailed, direct information, and reads like one man's assessment and interpretation of Biblical passages and strategies, rather than a comprehensive view of the subject. In the end, the book would be recommended, though as a supplement to further soul searching and Biblical counseling scholarship.

Works Cited

Collins GR, 1995, *How to Be a People Helper (Revised Edition)*, Tyndale House Publishers.