

Book Analysis

This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us

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Overview

The central theme of Riley's book, *This Here Flesh* was artfully constructed and presented by the author, to produce for readers an increased understanding of the connection between spirituality and liberation. There are certain aspects of liberation and spirituality that go deep internally within individuals, like the roots of a tree in the soil. Continuing with the roots of a tree analogy, there are things which impact us and continue to shape the core of who we are. As stated by Riley, "we get there by descending into the stories that reside in our bodies."¹

Analysis

The author utilized an insightful, engaging, but yet thought-provoking writing style for her readers. The first notable strength of this book was the author's use of contemplative storytelling. The author with great candor shared her stories as well as those of other individuals from different communities which she lived in. The second strength was how the author strategically utilized quotes from individuals like Martin Luther King, Toni Morrison, Howard Thurman, Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou, to add to the voice of Black individuals speaking out in connection to the central theme of the book. A third strength was how the author interwove the different chapters into a tapestry of salient points to not be quickly digested, but instead to be thought about as one explores the points of convergence between spirituality and liberation.

I enjoyed reading this book, however, in my opinion, one of the notable weaknesses was how the author referenced different individuals from the Bible but often without denoting an

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1. Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation and the Stories That Make Us*. (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2022), x.

applicable scripture reference. For example, when Christ was mentioned in the author's discussion on pg. 84 and Lazarus on page 97, there were no scripture references included in the discussion. Increased incorporation of Biblical passages would have served to intensify the theological connection and support of what was being discussed by the author.

The second weakness is one that germinated out of the author's conducted contemplative storytelling. In my opinion, the randomness of the main characters' (father, sister, grandmother, or brother) stories became distracting and appeared disjointed from building upon the previous stories which were shared. Nonetheless, there are tremendous benefits for all readers as a result of reading this book. The benefits encompass the author's pertinent discussions with salient points that were presented. These work towards achieving external as well as internal liberation on a personal level as one strives to increase or improve their spirituality.

Take-a-ways

One of my take-aways is that, "we need other people to see our own faces – to bear witness to their beauty and truth."² This highlights the importance of individuals operating, functioning, and progressing with a community mindset instead of by themselves. The second take-a-way is that "when I speak of wonder, I mean the practice of beholding the beautiful."³ There are so many ugly or unpleasant things one can experience throughout the week. We must condition our minds to not see or dwell upon the glass as half-full, the project as half-completed, and personal journeys as half-completed. We must function in connection to Philippians 4: 8,

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2. Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation and the Stories That Make Us*. 81.
3. Riley, 32.

as to maintaining positive thoughts. The third-take-a-way is the idea that “as joy gives way to dreaming, our hope becomes more and more secure.”⁴ This reinforces what is stated in Nehemiah 8:10 and John 15: 10-11 about experiencing the joy of God in our souls.

Significance for ministry

My first significance for ministry point is to realize that “fear can disrupt the most sacred patterns of rest and restoration.”⁵ To fear not is one of the most common expressions in the Bible which is directed by God. I am to model that loving directive and to encourage the same in the lives of others. My second significance for ministry is for me to be a proponent of the rationale that “true lament is not born from that trite sentiment that the world is bad but rather from a deep conviction that is worthy.”⁶ I must be willing to lament with a committed expectation to see what God can and is willing to do.

My third point is the idea that “to be liberated spiritually is to commune with and seek God without fear of alienation if we do not reach the same conclusions as our neighbor. It is to become spiritual creatives.”⁷ I must foster an environment of me unabashedly coming into God’s presence and being drawn closer to God. My ultimate desire and determination are for my spirituality to be fostered and cultivated by God. I also will endeavor to experience God’s liberating power in my life and those around me. I pray then for a boldness to willingly share the stories of what God has done in our lives and what He can equally do in the lives of others.

4. Riley. 169.

5. Riley, 85.

6. Riley, 98.

7. Riley, 186.

Bibliography

Riley, Cole Arthur. *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us*.

New York, NY.: Convergent Books. 2022.