

Reviews

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Jeffrey F. Keuss, ed., *Defiant Hope, Active Love: What Young Adults Are Seeking in Places of Work, Faith, and Community* (Eerdmans, 2024), 170 pages, \$22.99.

Young adults in the twenty-first century face unique challenges. As they navigate high costs of living, identity formation, social pressure to meet milestones, and frequent life transitions, young adults are increasingly leaving organized religion and seeking community elsewhere. Exploring a critical growth edge for the church, the contributors to *Defiant Hope, Active Love* present research on the needs, desires, and challenges of young adults. The authors not only present the facts but suggest strategies churches may adopt to serve young adults well.

In each chapter, the contributors discuss their findings on various topics related to young adulthood and ministry and conclude with questions designed to prompt practical responses. In chapter 1, Jeffrey F. Keuss and Robert Drovdaahl describe emerging adulthood as a developmental stage marked by significant instability and opportunity as emerging adults discover themselves, the world, and the role they want to play in it. In chapter 2, Gabrielle Metzler and Mathea Kangas examine how today's young adults are less likely to engage in organized religion than

previous generations and other age groups. Metzler and Kangas argue that churches are uniquely positioned to fulfill young adults' desires for social transformation and spiritual growth. In chapter 3, Lauren St. Martin suggests that effective young adult ministry must see engaging young adults as a call from God, intentionally promote community and spiritual formation, and provide authenticity, understanding, diversity, and mentorship. In chapter 4, Linda Montaña explains how the church can serve as a resource station to help young adults tackle obstacles and thrive during transitions. In chapter 5, Mackenzie Harris shows how churches can identify and empower young adult leaders while fostering healthy mentorship relationships and overcoming the challenges of shifting priorities, schedules, and life stages. In chapter 6, Martin Jiménez explores young adults' interactions with new church models and their draw to less-established churches where they can help shape the culture. Keuss concludes by reflecting on how the church can come alongside this age group in their efforts to heal the mind, body, and soul.

The respect and care the contributors show for young adults is evident in their research methods, analysis, and suggestions for ministry. Voices of young adults are present throughout the book. Not only are several of the researchers in this age group themselves, but they also surveyed and interviewed young adults and those serving them. As a "twenty-something" myself and former young adult ministry director, I resonate deeply with the research findings summarized in this book. The authors acknowledge the difficulties of ministering to a group in constant flux while encouraging and equipping leaders to lean into this call. Pastors seeking to better connect with and serve young adults will gain insight into their developmental stage, what they seek from their communities, the obstacles they face, and practical ways the church can respond to their needs to foster sustainable young adult ministry. This book will be especially helpful for those in progressive urban contexts or regions like the Pacific Northwest where the shift away from organized religion is particularly notable.

ALEXANDRIA FIGUEROA

Curt Thompson, *The Deepest Place: Suffering and the Formation of Hope* (Zondervan, 2023), 240 pages, \$17.

The fact that a clinical book on trauma written by a world-renowned psychiatrist was a *New York Times* bestseller says something about the paramount importance of this subject today. *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel van der Kolk not only spent 141 weeks on the coveted *New York Times* bestseller list but held the number one position for twenty-seven of those weeks. Whether addressing trauma is a felt need or just another thread in the fabric of the zeitgeist, one cannot deny that trauma is ubiquitous.

Still, questions surround this massive subject. What constitutes trauma? How do we respond to it? What does the intersection of trauma and discipleship look like? How do followers of Jesus make sense of all of this and hear what is true amidst the fray?

One such clarion call comes from Curt Thompson in his most recent book, *The Deepest Place: Suffering and the Formation of Hope*. Thompson is a board-certified psychiatrist, a follower of Jesus, and a thoughtful student of the Holy Scriptures. With remarkable skill and tender care, he integrates his expertise on interpersonal neurobiology and the teachings of the historic Christian faith. *The Deepest Place* is in one sense a long form exposition of Romans 5:1–5, supplemented with insights from contemporary studies in mental health.

One of the most powerful aspects of this book is Thompson's commitment to view suffering not as an obstacle to spiritual growth but as the ground in which deep transformation can take place. This is quite the subversive claim in our cultural moment, given our increasing proclivities toward comfort and ease, to which the church is not impervious. Thompson observes:

Our culture trains us to expect that we should not have to suffer, and that if we do for any reason we should then expect the environment around us to change so that we will no longer have to suffer.... There is little to no expectation that suffering actually has the potential to form us into more resilient people. This would be blasphemy against our culture's current code of conduct (86).

In a culture that seeks to avoid pain at all costs, Thompson reminds us that suffering is not something to be numbed or ignored. Rather, when

engaged with curiosity, compassion, and a willingness to be known by God and others, suffering can become the means by which we are formed more fully into the likeness of Christ.

I read this book in the wake of one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. It was recommended to me by a friend in the Covenant who knew what I was going through. The moment in the book that flipped the script for me regarding how I related to my trauma was in chapter 6:

We think that becoming more like God means becoming more powerful and protected from pain when in fact it is in our suffering—and in our persevering in the face of it in vulnerable community, the community of the Trinity as lived out in the body of Jesus—that we actually become more and more like God (123).

In that moment I was confronted not only with my truncated view of trauma but my truncated view of God himself. Far from trauma being something to be avoided or discarded, our suffering is a means by which we can come to identify with God, who is himself the One who identifies with us. As the author of Hebrews declares, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15, CSB).

In the end, *The Deepest Place* is more than just a book about trauma and healing—it is an invitation. An invitation to see our suffering through the lens of God’s love. It is an invitation to step into relationships that foster healing. And ultimately, it is an invitation to encounter Jesus in the very places we least expect—in our wounds, our struggles, and the depths of our pain. For anyone seeking a deeper understanding of how suffering and formation are inherently intertwined, this book is a must-read.

REID KAPPE

Jason A. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel: Jews, Former Gentiles, Israelites* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 350 pages, \$38.

Jason Staples explores how Paul’s redefinition of Israel’s boundaries—particularly regarding Israelite status, salvation, and gentile inclusion—is rooted in first-century Jewish restoration eschatology. This eschatology, drawn from prophetic texts, anticipates the return of all twelve tribes

from exile, not just Judah and Benjamin.¹

Building on his previous book, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism*, Staples argues that “Israel” refers either to the Northern Kingdom’s tribes or to the twelve-tribe covenantal people of YHWH.² “Jews” (or Judeans), by contrast, specifically denotes the Southern Kingdom’s tribes, who returned from exile in 539 BCE.³ He demonstrates that this distinction persisted in Second Temple sources, with some authors ceasing to refer to Israel after the Assyrian exile.⁴

Staples challenges the notion of “Israel” as an empirical ethnicity, arguing that such a definition imposes an anachronistic and scientifically rigid framework onto antiquity. Since ethnicity and religion were not separate categories in the ancient world, *ethnos* was defined by adherence to cultural and cultic practices rather than genealogy.⁵ Consequently, Israel’s boundaries were always negotiable, primarily through Torah observance. This interpretive lens applies to Paul, who views law-breaking Jews as outsiders and Torah-observant individuals as insiders (Rom 2:29; 8:4).⁶

Staples asserts that the debate over gentile circumcision only makes sense within the context of gentiles entering the covenant.⁷ Against his opponents, Paul contends that Spirit-filled gentiles are already Israelites and thus do not require circumcision.⁸ They join God’s people not as gentiles but as Israelites whose hearts have been circumcised by the Spirit.

According to Staples, the salvation of “all Israel” occurs as “the full number of the gentiles” (Rom 11:25) joins the remnant. Contrary to the prevailing (?) consensus, Paul does not envision the church as a “new

¹ Jason A. Staples, *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, 19, 45–62. He aligns with Pitre in critiquing N.T. Wright’s redefinition of “exile.” Pitre argues that while Wright’s insight is correct, he misidentifies the Exile, asserting that the southern tribes had indeed returned home. See Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of Atonement*. JSOTSup 37 (Baker Academic, 2005), 34–35; cf. James M. Scott, “‘For as Many as Are of the Works of the Law Are under a Curse’ (Galatians 3:10),” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield Academic, 1993), 187–221; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Fortress Press, 1993), 141–147 on the theme of continuing exile.

² Jason A. Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 339.

³ Staples, *Paul*, 48.

⁴ Staples, *Paul*, 50; Staples, *The Idea*, 43–51.

⁵ Staples, *Paul*, 15.

⁶ Staples, *Paul*, 18, 145–181.

⁷ Staples, *Paul*, 9.

⁸ Staples, *Paul*, 11.

entity...of Jews and gentiles coming together in Christ equally.”⁹ Instead, Paul is a first-century Jew, who remained within his original “theological, eschatological, and ethnic framework” even after identifying Jesus as Israel’s messiah.¹⁰

Staples makes a significant contribution to Pauline studies, particularly to the ongoing debate about the identity of gentile Christ-followers. His exegetical analysis engages with overlooked or dismissed texts, particularly Romans 2.¹¹ His extensive knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and ability to interpret Pauline writings within this broader scriptural and narrational framework are especially commendable. These strengths make his work a valuable resource, setting a benchmark for future scholarship. Among his novel interpretations is his argument that in Romans 11:25 (“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in”) Paul alludes to Jacob’s blessing over Ephraim, Israel’s leading tribe (“and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations” [Gen 48:19]).¹²

However, Staples’s work would have benefited from greater methodological clarity in identifying allusions in biblical texts, a common critique in biblical studies.¹³ Furthermore, why does Paul continue to address his recipients as gentiles if this identity is no longer relevant (e.g., Rom 11:13; cf. Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 5:1; 10:1; 12:2)? While not all readers will be convinced by Staples’s arguments, his work remains essential for any serious student of Paul.

MARKUS NIKKANEN

⁹ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 149.

¹⁰ Staples, *Paul*, 8, 5–6, 20. Staples critiques older readings of Paul for misrepresenting Judaism as works-based and portraying Paul’s conversion as a rejection of the law. While acknowledging that the New Perspective on Paul avoids anachronistic accusations of legalism, he argues that it fails to address Paul’s ethnocentrism (cf. Rom 1:16). He contends that it merely replaces “legalism” with “ethnocentrism” and projects modern inclusivity onto Paul’s theology. Paul’s debate is not about particularism versus inclusiveness but about defining the boundaries of God’s exclusive community.

¹¹ See Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Justification by Grace—to the Doers: An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul,” NTS 32, no. 1 (1986): 72–93.

¹² Staples, *Paul*, 307–312.

¹³ Staples briefly addresses this issue in relation to Paul’s audience’s competency on pages 27–28, but does not provide a methodological discussion on identifying allusions. See Paul Foster, “Echoes without Resonance: Critiquing Certain Aspects of Recent Scholarly Trends in the Study of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament,” JSNT 38 (2015): 96–111.