

Recovering:
From Brokenness and Addiction to Blessedness and Community

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Recovering is an outstanding resource written by a pastor who has lived in Vancouver for over 20 years among the people in Downtown Eastside, the poorest postal code in Canada. Aaron White not only draws on his experience shepherding those with addictions, but also has traveled the world to learn from the best treatment centres and non-profit organizations in the field of recovery. He further integrates insights from a broad spectrum of Christian resources, ancient and current, as well as resources from the grassroots recovery movement (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) (xii).

The subtitle of the book reveals the heart of White's thesis: *From Brokenness and Addiction to Blessedness and Community*. By this he means that the best hope for addicts to recover is for the church to become a deeply Christ-centred and blessed community. "Here is my central assumption: Beatitude Communities, based on Jesus's revolutionary blessings in the Sermon on the Mount, are the best hope for us to learn how to become fully human" (5). We accomplish this by taking each of the Beatitudes in order, studying them prayerfully and theologically, and then appropriating them into our lives individually and communally. The Beatitudes form a ladder that we ascend, climbing one rung after the next, so that together we as a devoted Christian community increasingly experience the Blessedness that Jesus promises in these sacred teachings (5f).

After Part 1, a relatively brief section on brokenness and blessedness, Part 2 moves through each of the Beatitudes in order. The chapter titles summarize the shape of his thought: for example, the title of Chapter 3 is "Surrendered Community: *The Poor in Spirit*," and Chapter 4 is "Lamenting Community: *Those Who Mourn*." Every chapter follows this pattern, wherein White extracts the core of the beatitude and uses it to describe the Beatitude Community as a whole. Recovery in his model is not a solo project, nor is it a secular journey. It only happens

with others, and it is best experienced in Christian community where Jesus is present at the heart of the fellowship.

Each chapter in Part 2 follows a similar pattern: a brief opening, a brief connection of the Beatitude to the ladder, an in-depth exploration of the Beatitude, and then ends with several practical ways to incorporate the principles into our shared life as the church.

One final note about White's model. At the end of the Resources section, he lists a practical resource that he co-wrote. Based on the description as well as a personal explanation of the resource, it appears to be very similar to this book, with one small modification. It's called "The Creative Way Down," which suggests that the Beatitude ladder goes *down* into the Blessed Life and the Beatitude Community, rather than up (174). I applaud this move, as travelling *down* the ladder of the blessed life is very much in keeping with poverty of spirit!

I found this book to be a very challenging read. It was difficult to take in more than one chapter or even section at a time, due to the intellectual richness and spiritual challenge. Every page was like a well-marinated steak – I could only digest so much at one time.

I was very impressed with the work and the statistics of success of the Alongsiders network that was started in Cambodia (112f). Is this a ministry that could work in the inner city in Regina?

Another proposal for the church in chapter nine, The Reconciling Community, is very intriguing to me. "Shouldn't churches have a practice of interpersonal reconciliation at least as rigorous as Alcoholics Anonymous?" (146). In our church family and the broader community, conflict abounds. I grew up in Churches of Christ, known for their restoration attempts of New Testament Christianity, a form of biblicism. Yet this is one aspect of biblical Christianity that we have seldom practiced. This, along with washing one another's feet (recently suggested by

one of our newer members), as well as keeping an active list of widows that the church cares for (1 Tim. 5:3-10), are practices that I believe the church should recover and actively practice.

Two sections near the end of the book were especially convicting. One was “Outside the Camp with Jesus” (158). His discussion of Jesus being persecuted for the sake of righteousness was very intriguing. As Christ’s followers, we are called to suffer the same type of persecution. This means we are required to be in the same places as Jesus – outside the camp of respectability and power, “with the unclean, the undesirables, the orphans, widows, foreigners, sinners, and substance users (Heb. 13:12)” (158f). This is something that I had already been thinking about, but White’s presentation took it even further. I have felt that the church in the West is weak and flabby, that we are given to comfort, safety, and entertainment. To suffer persecution to the same extent as Jesus, in the manner that White describes, is very challenging. Lord, help me to embrace the life of suffering that you have called me to!

The second convicting passage came later in the same chapter, where he describes a painful season when their church was asking themselves a hard question: were the most broken and destitute truly welcome at the heart of their fellowship, or were they simply in love with the idea of serving the poor, meanwhile settling for less costly relationships (168)? I found this question striking in its authenticity and vulnerability. It led me to ask similar things of our fellowship, and plumb the depths of my own heart. Is it truly love for the most despised that motivates me, or is this a romanticized ideal? Lord, have mercy, and purify my heart!

Overall, I found the first Beatitude chapter and the last to be the two hardest to read from a spiritual standpoint, and the most challenging.