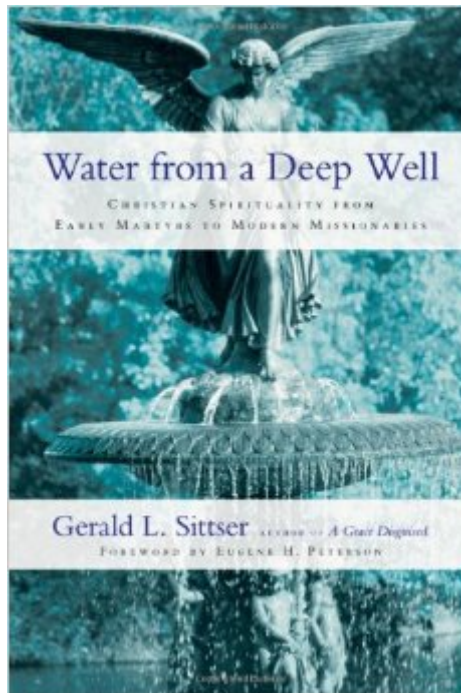


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Water From A Deep Well: Christian Spirituality From Early Martyrs To Modern Missionaries



Synopsis

In Rome in A.D. 165, two men named Carpus and Papyrus stood before the proconsul of Pergamum, charged with the crime of being Christians. Not even torture could make them deny Christ, so they were burned alive. Is my faithfulness as strong? In the fifth century, Melania the Younger and her husband, Pinian, distributed their enormous wealth to the poor and intentionally practiced the discipline of renunciation. Could living more simply deepen my trust in God? In the sixteenth century, Philipp Jakob Spener's love for the Word of God and his desire to help people apply the Bible to their life moved him to start "Colleges of Piety," or small groups. In what ways could commitment to community make me more like Christ? The history of the church has shaped what our faith and practice are like today. It's tempting to think that the way we do things now is best, but history also has much to teach us about what we've forgotten. In *Water from a Deep Well*, Gerald Sittser opens to us the rich history of spirituality, letting us gaze at the practices and stories of believers from the past who had the same thirst for God that we do today. As we see their deep faith through his vibrant narratives, we may discover that old ways can bring new life to our own spirituality.

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Customer Reviews

Just finished Gerald Sittser's book *Water from a deep well* for my next D.Min. class. I have to admit, this is not a book that I would have sought out or even stumbled across in a bookstore, but it is a treasure. This is one of the most powerful books I have ever read, and that is saying a lot, since I've read a few. What Sittser does is something that every Christian needs, not just leaders, but everyone

who claims to follow Jesus. He gives us a history lesson. So many of us have no idea about the history of Christianity, why at its heart it is a missionary religion, the passion of those who have gone before, the blood that was spilled for the movement of Jesus to be where it is. It is so rich, so powerful and gives us such passion and enables us to continue following after God to this day. It starts by looking at martyrs throughout church history. For many of us in the Western world, the idea of dying for your faith is remote, if not a non-thought. But, as "missiologist David B. Barrett estimates 160,000 Christians were martyred in the year 2000 alone. They died that year for the same basic reason they died in the year 155, when Polycarp was martyred, or in 202, when Perpetua was martyred. The early martyrs believed that if Jesus is Lord and the only Savior, then he accepts no rivals - no person or religion or ideology or empire. They affirmed that the Christian faith requires nothing less than a firm and joyful commitment to this conviction. Jesus came as God in human flesh to show the way to God and to be the way to God for us. This is the only Jesus there is. A lesser Jesus is not the real Jesus at all, at least not according to the testimony of the martyrs, from Stephen to the present.

Water From a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality From Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries (2007, IVP) by Gerald Sittser was an excellent book, but perhaps a bit difficult to classify. It is part church history, part Christian spirituality, and part practical living. In engaging prose, Sittser explores the history of Christianity, stopping along the way to reflect on what lessons we have learned from those who have gone before. He effectively shows different movements over the history of the church: the witness of the early Christian martyrs, the belonging of early Christian community, the struggle of the desert saints, the rhythm of the monastics, the holy heroes celebrated in the eastern church through biography and iconography, the importance of the sacraments during the Gothic period, the importance of ordinariness among medieval lay people, the importance of the Word to the reformers, the centrality of conversion to evangelicals, and the essence of risk to pioneer missionaries. As you can imagine this book is sweeping and ecumenical in its scope. Though Sittser highlights components that featured centrally in different movements of the church, there is no doubt overlap. Sittser wisely not only identifies the positives that modern Christians can learn from each of these periods or modes of spirituality, but also points to their potential risks and abuses. For example, during certain movements of the church, it was considered more spiritual to abstain from sexual relations, and some couples would make vows of chastity within their marriages. Broadly, it seems that any of these approaches, taken to the extreme, lead to rather significant legalism, which Sittser explicitly shows. There is material here to challenge all.

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