

# ***HEART-TO-HEART***

## **A Pastoral Letter From Richard J. Foster May 1999**



Dear Friends,

Today, I want to share with you on the theme of the kingdom of God. I do this in one sense as a follow-up to our recent *RENOVARÉ Perspective*, but even more importantly as a way of preparing for our Houston Conference where we will deal substantively with the theme of the kingdom of God. (I do hope you are coming to Houston June 30-July 3. If you cannot be there, we will miss you, but, of course, God will be with you right where you are and will guide you into increasing life and joy in the kingdom of God.) In this pastoral letter let me be a bit autobiographical, tracing my early journey in trying to understand the kingdom of God.

### ***HUNGRY FOR GOD***

As a teenager I was hungry for God. More than any other thing I wanted God and I began seeking after the kingdom of God. In my seeking I would come upon passages like Matthew 11:2, "The kingdom of God is coming violently and the violent take it by force." Now, I did not fully understand that passage, but, even so, I became a "violent person," violent in the sense that I would not let anything stop me from seeking after the kingdom of God. Like Jesus taught I was prepared to sell everything I had to get the kingdom of God. So I would ask everyone I knew:

What is the kingdom of God?

Where is the kingdom of God?

How do I enter the kingdom of God?

I kept looking for someone, anyone to teach me about the kingdom of God, but I could find no one . . . no one. In those years I couldn't even find any books that would teach me about the kingdom of God. . . . Well, I did find one book—Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship*—and as a teenager I clung to it like a drowning person clings to a life preserver. I read that book ragged, for it spoke to me about life in the kingdom of God. Beyond that single book, however, I found little to help me. But I kept on seeking, seeking, seeking, and in time I learned some things about the kingdom of God. Let me share with you some of those early "openings onto truth."

### ***SALVATION AS LIFE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD***

The first insight I received was that Jesus and his first apostles were preaching a salvation that is different from the kind of salvation that is preached today. They were talking about life in the kingdom of God, and they were speaking of it as a present reality. For them the "age to come" had been catapulted back into human history, and they lived in the life and power of the kingdom of God, and, indeed, as we are to live now. Now, I know that there is a future dimension to the kingdom of God in its final consummation when Christ returns, but the stress of the apostolic message is always upon the kingdom as a present reality manifest in our midst.

Now, once this idea was opened to me, I saw the whole of Scripture saturated with it. "The kingdom of God is at hand." "The kingdom of God is in your midst." "The kingdom of God has come nigh unto you." "The kingdom of God is within you." And on and on.

This became a precious reality to me as a young teenager, and it contrasted dramatically with the kind of salvation I heard preached all around me. That salvation spoke only of mental assent to certain beliefs, perhaps reciting an enclosed prayer—all of which somehow tripped the celestial lever and I would be guaranteed heaven when I died. I saw that such teaching offered me little more than a "fire insurance policy," an easy ticket to heaven, but it said nothing about my living here and now.

To be sure, heaven is an important matter. And Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God most certainly includes heaven. But the stress of Jesus is always upon the kingdom as a present reality, so that death simply becomes a transition from the life that we are experiencing now to the greater LIFE that we shall experience.

In this sense faith in Christ and life in his way is almost entirely this worldly. You see, heaven is not a goal; heaven is a destination. The goal for the Christian is life in the kingdom of God. It means being taken over by a new life and power outside ourselves. It is the transformation of the inward personality and life under God.

### ***OBEDIENCE IN THE KINGDOM***

A second opening that came to me during those early days was that this is not some warm, cozy club, but life in a “kingdom” (or “queendom” if you prefer). In the kingdom of God there is a sovereign ruler and he is obeyed. Indeed, the kingdom of God means simply the reign or government of God; it is the place where what God says is done. This is no smorgasbord spirituality, no pick and choose faith. It is not even a participatory democracy in which I cast my vote on how I should live. For example, God’s description of the best possible way to live—we call it the Ten Commandments—is not something I can take or leave if I want. Nor can I opt for only Commandments Six and Nine and leave the rest. It is to be obeyed—all of it. God is in charge and what he says goes.

Some today like to refer to the kingdom of God as a “kin-dom,” emphasizing Jesus as our friend. True, Jesus is our Friend—the very best—but he is only our Friend if he is first and foremost our Lord. Jesus himself makes this unmistakably clear when he says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). We know Jesus as Lord in order to be in a position to experience him as Friend.

This point is powerfully illustrated by an experience in the life of Dr. Graham Scroggie, one of the great orators of a past generation. Dr. Scroggie was speaking at one of the great Keswick Conventions in London on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And he spoke as only the great orators of another generation could speak: his logic compelling, his rhetoric magnetic, his dramatic appeal masterful. He finished that marvelous address on “Christ, the Lord,” and, after the throngs had left, he noticed a young college student in the center of the vast auditorium all alone. He went to her and asked if he could help.

“Oh, Dr. Scroggie,” she blurted out, “your message was so compelling. But I’m afraid . . . I’m afraid that if I see Christ as Lord that it will mean changes in me that I don’t want. He may ask me to do things that I’m afraid to do.”

Wisely Graham Scroggie turned in his Bible to the tenth chapter of the book of Acts, to the story of Peter in the upper room of Simon, a tanner, in the city of Joppa. There God gave Peter a tri-fold vision of a great sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals unclean to Jewish religious tradition. Three times God said to Peter, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” And three times Peter responded, “No, Lord!”

Looking directly into her eyes, Dr. Scroggie said calmly, “You know, it is possible to say ‘no’ and it is possible to say ‘Lord’ but it is not really possible to say ‘no, Lord’.” He added, “Here is my Bible and a pen. I’m going into another room and pray for you, and I want you to take this pen and strike out either the word ‘no’ or the word ‘Lord’.”

He did this, and when he sensed that the matter had been settled, he reentered the auditorium and slipped up behind her. She did not know he was there. She was weeping quietly and tears were falling on his Bible. Leaning over her shoulder he saw the word ‘no’ crossed out and she was whispering over and over, “He’s Lord, He’s Lord, He’s Lord.”

### ***THE KINGDOM IN MYSTERY FORM***

My new understanding of the importance of obedience to God dovetailed perfectly into a third insight that came to me in those early days so long ago now. That insight was the fact that the kingdom comes to us in mystery form—not mystery in the sense of “strange,” but mystery in the sense of hidden. God just took the kingdom and tucked it away.

Now, I have often wondered why God did this. Why did God hide the kingdom from people? Why, for example, did Jesus expressly say that he spoke in parables for the purpose of hiding the truth from people; “The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ . . . ‘For this people’s heart has grown dull . . . so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn’” (Matt. 13:13).

God, you see, hid the kingdom because he wants us to seek it—“Seek first the kingdom of God . . .” God desires that we desire him. He wants within us an inward disposition of heart to turn toward him. When Jesus said

that “hearing people will not hear and seeing they will not see,” he was underscoring the fact that often people simply do not hear or see to the point that they will turn, that they will change their behavior. Their hearts are not prepared to turn.

What would you do if I told you that the sheet of paper you are now reading will explode with a blinding flash in five seconds? . . . Didn't you hear me?! Oh, you heard me all right, but you didn't hear me to the point that it changed your behavior. You knew, of course, that I was not serious about the paper exploding, but I am deadly serious when I say to you that change is the key. We are to hear Christ to the point that it will change our behavior. This is why God wants us to seek him.

Then I understood: **The kingdom of God is veiled to us because God does not want us to see or understand until we have an inward heart disposition toward God.** Without this inward heart disposition the knowledge and power of the kingdom will hurt us rather than help us. It is only when we desire God with all our heart that we can be trusted with the life of the kingdom of God.

The moment I grasped this idea I cried out, “Oh God, give me an inward heart disposition toward you;  
search my heart,  
change my heart,  
win my heart,  
rule my heart,  
so that I may ever desire you.”

### ***POWER IN THE KINGDOM***

Then, as I studied and prayed and sought after God, I received a fourth insight that became very important to me, though also very troublesome. I came across passages of Scripture like 1 Corinthians 4:19, “For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but power.” Slowly I began to see that life in the kingdom of God is somehow intricately connected with this thing called power. I would read, for example, that Jesus “went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Matt. 4:23).

What I began to see—slowly, very slowly for I actually did not welcome this reality—was a pattern of proclamation and demonstration, proclamation and demonstration. Jesus proclaimed the presence of the kingdom and then demonstrated the reality of its presence by healings and other works of power and love. I noticed that Jesus delegated this same authority to the first Apostles; “Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to

### ***OUR FINANCIAL GUIDELINES***

- We urge everyone to give first to their local church (or wherever they are being nurtured spiritually) and to the poor before ever giving to RENOVARÉ.
- An accountant oversees our financial records in accord with accepted accounting procedures and the highest professionalism.
- We will live within our means. One thing we refuse to do is overextend and overspend ourselves and then beg for God's people to bail us out. We believe that God will give us the money to do what we are being called to do. We feel it involves just as much faith to trust God for the money before a purchase as after a purchase. In fact, one way we discern God's will for the ministry of RENOVARÉ is through the financial support of his people.
- We believe in full disclosure at all times. Our financial reports are available to anyone upon request.
- We will receipt all donations.
- If we offer books, tapes, or other materials for a suggested contribution, we will receipt the amount given above the retail price of the product plus shipping and handling costs.
- When we make a purchase, we will pay the bill within thirty days. We refuse to subsidize this ministry on the backs of vendors.
- We will never sell or rent our mailing list.
- We are primarily a voluntary organization and as such we depend in large measure upon the sacrificial labors of many. If, however, we employ paid staff, they will receive equal pay for equal work.
- We will communicate our financial needs to our constituency as clearly and as truthfully as possible. We will not inflate or overstate our situation, nor create a crisis to boost income.
- We believe RENOVARÉ was initiated and continues to be sustained by God. While we are eager to follow the Divine whisper at every turn and work with all our might, it is God's business and not ours to prosper or end the work of RENOVARÉ . We rejoice either way.

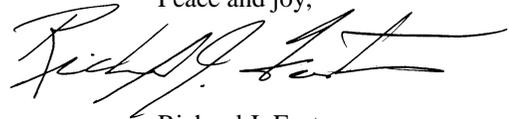
cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Luke 9:1). He even commissioned the Seventy—ordinary disciples like you and me—in much the same way: “After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him . . . [saying] cure the sick who are there, and say to them ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:1, 9). Then I came across that absolutely shocking word of Jesus, “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

I could not get around it: this business of the kingdom of God is connected with power. But as I told you, this teaching was troubling to me, and it was troubling because, as the old adage puts it, “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Power is a dangerous thing and I had seen it destroy people or at the very least cause them to do very unkind and unloving things to others.

So, all this troubled me . . . until I understood that God was intent on making us into the kind of people who could receive his power in such a way that it would be used only to bless and never to curse. Once again, you see, I was struck by the importance of the formation and reformation and conformation and transformation of the human personality into the likeness of Christ. I saw that in the kingdom of God I must be prepared to go through the character changes necessary to handle power for the good of all. You too.

Well, these small insights into life in the kingdom of God. May God meet you and refresh you as you constantly seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

P.S. While we do not go in for expensive appeal letters, we have promised to let you, our friends and supporters, know our financial needs. This we do by means of this brief (and hopefully unobtrusive) postscript. We do need you to stand with us financially as never before. The Houston Conference is upon us and will demand financial resources far beyond anything we normally handle. Also, the lean summer months are upon us. So please, give as God enables you. Thank you.

RJF

**Remember to register for the International Conference scheduled for June 30-July 3, 1999, in Houston, Texas. If you don't have a brochure or can't find your copy, call 303-792-0152 or e-mail 103165.327@compuserve.com. I urge you to take advantage of this rare opportunity to explore more deeply our life in the kingdom of God.**

*Permission is granted to duplicate this letter for free distribution. Any quotations or references to it should give proper credit to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA.*

**Keep this portion as a reminder.  
All gifts are tax deductible.**

- Regular Prayer Support.
- Financial:  
Single Gift . . . . . \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Monthly . . . . . \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Quarterly . . . . . \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Make checks out to RENOVARÉ and mail to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA.**

**Send this section to RENOVARÉ in the enclosed  
self-addressed envelope.**

- Please send me a RENOVARÉ Covenant Card so I can prayerfully read, consider, and sign it.
- Regular Prayer Support.
- Financial Support.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please print clearly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address