

# HEART-TO-HEART

**May 2002**  
**A Pastoral Letter from Roger Fredrikson**



Dear Friends,

I have known about “grace” all my life, understanding in a small way God’s merciful dealing with us. The language of grace became part of my vocabulary growing up in a parsonage. My father often spoke of grace in his sermons—best in his native Swedish—sometimes with tears. As a boy of ten I “went forward” to accept Jesus as my Savior, flooded with joy that my sins were forgiven and I was a “child of the King.” I was touched by grace. Then during my first year in college I was called in grace to be obedient to God’s will, and became more intimately acquainted with the Book whose major theme is grace.

But during seminary years grace became an object of study more than a gift to be received. And in church work I was often tempted to become a “peddler of grace,” rather than living in the wonder of the gift. So at times I have become dull and unresponsive. Taking eternal realities for granted, life can be too much with us. The daily routine and “getting on to the next project” can keep us concentrating more on the sidewalk than living in the wonder of the silent stars.

But grace cannot be worked for or earned. It is a gift only received when we surrender, coming with open hands. Our oldest son called home on a Monday morning some years ago and greeted us, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” I could only respond, “What has happened to you, Randy?” His answer lingers with us to this day, “I have capitulated to the Lord.” This after graduating from seminary. He had picked up two committed and sophisticated Jesus people who were hitch-hiking. They had lovingly “gone to the mat” with him over the Lordship of Jesus. Grace has flooded his life ever since.

I am thankful for all those times I have become freshly aware of grace, times when I have been open to an unexpected visitation by a gracious God, being quickened within, like our son Randy, meeting someone radically free who has sold all to follow Jesus. Or when I have been drawn into a community of open, seeking, fellow pilgrims. Or I have been called on to accept some overwhelming responsibility, and I needed help for there was no way I could handle this demand alone. Or struggling to express thanks in some small way for a generous, unexpected act of kindness. Surely God has been present in all these and many others. And I have been opened again to see his grace evident in all the common experiences of life.

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Some years ago Ruth and I found ourselves facing Tom Braithwaite, our doctor and friend. The nurse had called, “The doctor wants to see you at 4:30 this afternoon.” We were there on time. After a friendly greeting, he came to the point. “I’m afraid I have bad news for you. The exam revealed your white blood count is abnormally high—125,000—when it should be between 4 and 11 thousand. I’m ninety-eight percent certain that you have leukemia. Let’s hope it’s chronic. You can get a second opinion or I can make an appointment for you at the Mayo Clinic.” I sat in stunned silence, reaching out for Ruth’s hand. “Could this really be happening to me?” I drew a breath, then managed to

answer, “No, Tom, you’ve helped me before and I trust you. I want to stay with you.” Then, “We’ll make an appointment for a bone marrow biopsy with a pathologist and then we can visit about an oncologist. We’re in this together.” He may never know what those words meant to me.

We drove home in heavy silence. What could we say? We had entered a different world. I was helpless, at the mercy of a strange disease over which I had no control. As soon as we entered our home, we embraced in tears and cried out to the One who holds all our times in his hand. I spent a sleepless night, tossing and turning, wrestling with haunting doubts and questions which I could not put down. “The dark night of the soul” St. John of the Cross called it. “What had I done with my life that really mattered?” “How much time did I have? “Where is God now?” I could not help thinking of those

## What had I done with my life that really mattered?

opportunities I had missed, the times with the family I had wasted, the thoughtless, unkind remarks I had tossed at people. Then chided myself because Christians are not supposed to be this way. And intermittently sought to pray. Next to me lay this precious woman who had been my loving companion for more than fifty years. Dozing and prayer. How could I ever thank her?

I spent the next day groping and wondering, and sharing the news with our children, who heard and wept, assuring us of their love and prayers, asking if there was anything they could do.

That evening when Ruth and I opened the Scripture before retiring, we came on Peter’s strong words of hope to the scattered, persecuted Christians of that day. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Light and hope seemed to flood the room. Here was the Lord’s word for me, personal and clear. A moment of illumination and life, God had heard my cry, his fresh resources of grace flooded my inner being. We knelt with tears of praise and joy, overwhelmed that God had visited us and cleansed me, set me free from my self-pity, knowing again I was constantly nourished and blessed by generous gifts I did not deserve—gifts I could not earn, only surrender and receive.

An openness and a spirit of thanks were given me. I immediately came to trust and respect my oncologist, a kind man of hope. I was delighted to learn he came from a small town near the Ramsey Baptist church which my father had served. As I began to be given my interferon injection—at first every day, then five days a week, and finally three days a week which went on for four and one-half years—I came to have a profound sense of thanks for the men and women who have given their lives to research, making this medication available for people like me. Truly a gift of grace! The cheerful, compassionate nurses who administered the injection became trusted friends. Another gift! And the cancer center waiting room became an unexpected arena for friendly ministry, meeting people who were eager for some word of encouragement.

I began to see daily common events with new eyes. Driving home from the Cancer Center one day I couldn’t resist pulling over to the curb to watch a blond, tow-headed boy—perhaps 6 or 7—lunch bucket in hand, knap-sack on his back, dancing carefree and uninhibited through McKennan Park. And found myself quietly weeping with joy as I remembered Jesus’ words, “Unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

Making the bed with Ruth one morning, now a daily routine to get the day underway, I found myself simply gazing at this unselfish, caring woman, grateful that we have been friends, partners, and lovers for all these years. Or watching the sparrows in the bushes outside our living room window, fluffing their feathers to warm themselves on a bitterly cold South Dakota morning. Being reminded of our

heavenly Father's care for them, will he much more care for us who often have such little faith.

And what a joy it was to join with Zanab Annan and some of her family this last Holy Week to break ground for her Habitat for Humanity house. She had waited two years for this day. Zanab's husband had been killed in the brutal war being fought in Sudan. She came to our community with her seven children to begin a new life. She now works the night shift at the Morrell meat packing plant. Ruth and I have been graciously welcomed into her crowded apartment several times, coming to encourage her as "advocates" for her Habitat house. Now we gathered to dedicate this lot on which her house will be built. Grace and glory seem to break out all around us, we are standing on "holy ground."

A month ago I went to the Cancer Center for my six-month blood test, visiting freely with some of those helpful friends in the infusion room again. Eventually Dr. Keppen slipped into the exam room and greeted me warmly. Then, "Congratulations. Your blood count is perfect. The best it's been since you started treatment. We'll see you in six months." I could only respond in amazed gratitude, wondering, "Why me?" Some who were coming here when I began treatment are no longer with us. Every day here has become a special gift, a foretaste of what is to come!

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Earlier I had been drawn by the Spirit into a fresh, living movement—a community of grace—called RENOVARÉ. How surprisingly this all unfolded. Little did I realize when I picked up a book entitled *Celebration of Discipline* some twenty years ago which truly spoke to my condition, I would meet the author, Richard Foster. The warm response to that book coming from people in every corner of Christian life—Pentecostal to Orthodox—revealed a hunger for renewal that was deep and inclusive. Not centering on one particular tradition or discipline, but a renewal bringing together different streams of life flowing through the whole Church.

I have been blessed and have grown in grace serving on the Board of RENOVARÉ since its very beginning. Not a Board in the usual sense focusing on institutional business, but a creative, ecumenical family truly representing the whole body of Christ.

## **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.

Each yearly meeting, really a retreat, is an intimate experience of grace and joy. For three days we share our lives and our dreams for the Church, often with laughter and tears. Now and then we are strengthened, built up, in times of confession and healing. And songs and prayer and Scripture are the center of our gathering, concluding in the last hour with the holy hush of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

The RENOVARÉ Conferences, led by Richard and various Board Members, are a reflection of this open, refreshing style of life. These are times when we discover together through teaching and discussion the meaning of living out a balanced life. As we open our lives to one another in the sessions, visiting in the halls, breaking bread together, we discover anew the rich wonder of God's family. Friendships are made that will last forever. We conclude those few hours together by asking people to form themselves into small groups (usually a time of holy confusion). Here they are introduced to the possibilities of being a spiritual formation group back home. What a beautiful sound to hear the music of discussion, laughter, and prayer filling the meeting room.

Running through these hours are glorious, uplifting experiences of worship. Will any of us ever forget singing "The Apostle's Creed"? I recall our gifted, gentle worship leader, George Skramstad, saying almost casually at one conference, "Let's join in this little song, 'Grace to You.'" So we sang, "Grace to you, grace to you; May grace abound in all you do. Grace to do the will of the Father; Grace, grace to you." Then as we turned and sang those words to the person nearest us, it struck me that this is what RENOVARÉ is all about. Becoming more and more a healing community of grace, sharing the life of Christ. What a calling for each of us. Turning in love, facing those about us—family, neighbors, fellow workers, even strangers—being grace to them in word and deed!

Grace to You!



Roger Fredrikson

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