

Perspective

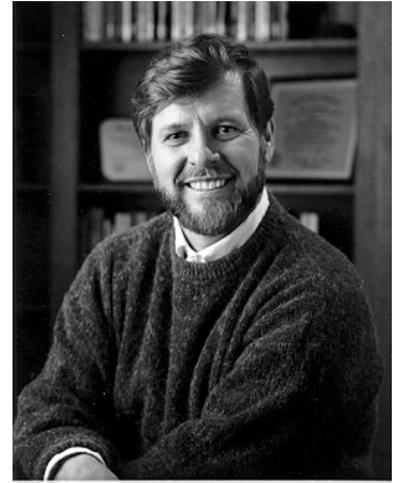
Vol. 1, No. 2

Growing Edges

I am engaging in a wonderful new experiment this year. In order to give practical expression to my experience of solitude, I have scheduled into my calendar four private retreats, following the seasons of the year--winter, spring, summer, fall. These are brief retreats of 24 to 48 hours, depending on my time constraints, but they keep me into a training program of solitude.

Our Leader's Lead

Have you ever noticed the many times Jesus experienced solitude? Mark's haunting words, "in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place" is the signature written across Jesus' ministry (1:35). Jesus needed frequent retreat and solitude to do his work, and yet somehow we think we can get by without the same. It is time we follow our Leader's lead.



An Open Empty Space

The major thing a private retreat accomplishes is to create an open empty space in our lives. We learn to "waste" time for God. Slowly, we come to hear God's speech in his wondrous, terrible, loving, all-embracing silence. Gently, we press into the holies of holies where we are sifted in the stillness. Painfully, we let go of the vain images of ourselves that seemed so essential. Joyfully, we loosen our grip on all those projects that appeared so significant.

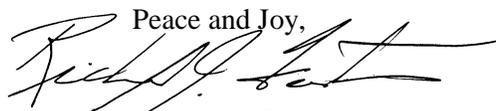
Most wonderful of all is the empowerment we receive: overcoming love, faith that can see everything in the light of God's governance for good, hope that can carry us through the most discouraging of circumstances, and power to overcome evil and do what is right.

Praxis

I urge every one associated with RENOVARÉ--and especially those who have signed the covenant--to experience a private retreat at least once a year. A weekend is a wonderful time frame, and most church leaders will be glad to free you from Sunday responsibilities and pray for you as you go. If you are like me, you will need to schedule such times far ahead, otherwise competing commitments will eat you alive.

Several practical matters need attention. First, choose a place that is free from distraction. Go to a retreat center that understands what a private retreat is and will honor your need for silence. Or perhaps you can find a mountain cabin, or a beach house. Several are beginning to set up guest rooms or Poustinia's on their property for retreatants.

Second, stoutly refuse to over-structure the time. Long prayer-filled walks are often more useful than hectic-filled rituals. Quiet meditation on a single phrase of Scripture is frequently preferable to panting through many chapters. Reflecting in a journal on the work of God within us is usually more profitable than massive reading of devotional literature. Sometimes nothing should be done--simply and intentionally "waste" the time for God. Happy retreating!

Peace and Joy,

Richard J. Foster

Going Deeper

Spiritual Formation Training Groups

In his classic book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan wrote an allegory of the Christian life. In it, the main character (named Christian) journeys from the City of Destruction toward the Celestial City. Along the way he faces obstacles--the Hill of Difficulty, the Slough of Despond, the Town of Vanity Fair--and is helped by occasional guides who offer him help and advice.

Most notable are his companions. Bunyan rightly understood the importance of having fellow Christians who journey with us--without which we will fail. Several times in the story Christian begins to lose heart, or is misled, only to have one of his companions offer encouragement and good counsel. For example, in the Enchanted Ground, a place where pilgrims tend to fall asleep, Christian and Hopeful work to keep each other awake. Hopeful concludes, "I see it is true what the wise man says: `Two are better than one'" (Eccles. 4:9).

I have found this to be true in my own experience. I need the help of other Christians--not to be a "super disciple"--but just to make it! Spiritual Formation Training Groups have provided this for me. Each week I gather with four other Christians who, like me, have made a covenant to live the Christian life.

We are not trying to be pious, and we are not trying to earn our way to heaven by religious works. Rather, our aim is to encourage each other through the grace of mutual accountability and to give guidance to one another when it is needed.

Each week we gather to do three things: 1) to look back over the past week, sharing our joys and our struggles; 2) to look to the week ahead, planning and committing ourselves to specific disciplines that will strengthen us and those around us; and 3) to share our needs and concerns so that we can pray for each other.

This accomplishes our ultimate goal: encouragement. I always feel refreshed and inspired after our meetings. I am excited to go about the next week. The group offers me a kind of strength I cannot do without. What's more, they offer me guidance, having the courage to tell me when I have undertaken too much, the wisdom to help me see what obstacles I might face, and the words of peace and forgiveness when I have fallen.

I would like nothing more than to shout from the mountaintops, "No more `Lone Ranger' Christianity! Don't try to make it alone!" After reading the Gospels I notice that Jesus never sent a disciple out alone. I now see his wisdom.

Jim Smith

Conducting a Spiritual Formation Group Meeting

Many of us are beginning to experience the nurture and support that comes with a weekly gathering of a RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation Group. The meetings go through seven basic steps -- with generous allowance for serendipitous experiences of the Holy Spirit. I have listed those steps below in the hopes that they will be useful to you as you consider starting such a group. (The text of the Covenant, Common Disciplines, and Self-examination Questions is in the RENOVARÉ booklet.)

ONE: THE OPENING WORDS--to be read by the leader

Welcome to the RENOVARÉ (or other chosen name of the group) Spiritual Formation Group. May God's Holy Spirit bless you, and may you find fellowship and encouragement during this time together. Remember, we gather together with one purpose in mind--to become better disciples of Jesus Christ. We do this by encouraging one another to keep his commands, which, as he said, is how we love him (John 14:23-4). Through the grace of mutual accountability, our aim is to inspire one another to love and good works.

Please keep in mind that everything that is said here is to be held in confidence. Only then can we feel free enough to share openly and honestly. All hopes and dreams, all fears and failures, all joys and successes, all sins and sufferings, are to be kept within these walls. This is how we help each other.

And finally, let us make God's joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit and in purpose. Let us refrain from gossip or selfishness but, in humility, count others better than ourselves, looking not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.

TWO: THE COVENANT--to be read by all in unison

The covenant gives focus and direction. All are expressing their commitment to the risen Christ who is present among his people to forgive, instruct, lead, and befriend. By the power of Christ we seek after continual renewal through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service.

THREE: THE COMMON DISCIPLINES

--to be read by individual members

As each share in the reading of the five common disciplines it reminds us once again of our commitment to draw from the five great Christian traditions--Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical. This gives us a balanced vision of Christian faith and practice.

FOUR: THE SELF-EXAMINATION

QUESTIONS--to be discussed together

This is the heart of the meeting. The questions gently probe into our practice of discipleship. They also provide a spring board for each one to tell his or her story. There are two aspects to answering the questions: how has it gone this past week, and what are your plans for next week? Initially you will want to focus on each specific question, but in time all the questions will form a backdrop to your discussion.

FIVE: PRAYER CONCERNS

After allowing the self-examination questions to probe our faithfulness, the leader asks for needs and situations that need prayer. It is often helpful

for members to write down these needs so that they can pray over them throughout the week.

SIX: INTERCESSIONS

Now the group enters into prayer for each other. Flow freely with this ministering to the needs of one another. Bring forgiveness, grace and mercy, and encouragement as the Lord prompts you.

SEVEN: CLOSING WORDS--said by the leader

Please remember that what you have said here and what you have heard here was spoken in confidence and therefore should remain here when you leave. May the love, the peace, and the power of God be with you this week as you endeavor to do his will. Let us close our meeting by praying the prayer that our Lord taught those very first disciples, saying, "Our Father . . ." (together pray the Lord's prayer). Amen.

Using these seven steps, nearly anyone can lead a Formation Group. It only takes two people, and Christ will be among you as your ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend.

This quarter we are featuring two books by RENOVARÉ team members that we believe you need to know about. The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard is the most important book in recent years on the theological basis for the classical Disciplines of the spiritual life. Nobody understands these issues better than Dr. Willard who teaches philosophy at USC. In this book he breaks the horns of the works/grace dilemma. His essay in the appendix on "Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?" is worth the entire price of the book. Essential reading.

We at RENOVARÉ believe in the Church. With all of her warts, blemishes, and idiosyncrasies we still believe in the Church, which is why Roger Fredrikson's new book, The Church that Refused to Die, is such a cause for celebration. It is a wonderful story of healing and reconciliation. So often when churches fight and divide, there is enduring bitterness and rancor. We can all be glad that at one place and time more can be said, and that "more" gives us great hope for the renewal of the Church. You will want to read this remarkable story.

Going Places with Richard J. Foster

- April 3-5--Staley Lectures, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA
- April 5--RENOVARÉ National Conference Steering Committee Meeting, World Vision, Monrovia, CA
- April 5-6--Elders/Staff Retreat for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Rancho Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA
- April 7--Church Services, First Baptist Church of Reseda, Reseda, CA
- April 12-13--RENOVARÉ Local Conference on Personal Spiritual Renewal, First United Methodist Church, Wichita, KS
- April 16-17--Gheens Lectures, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY
- April 27-28--Park Avenue Baptist Church, Titusville, FL
- April 30-May 5--Young Life Staff Retreat, Trail West, CO
- May 31--RENOVARÉ National Conference Workshop Leaders' Orientation, Lake Avenue Congregational Church, Pasadena, CA
- May 31--RENOVARÉ Breakfast for Christian Leaders, Lake Avenue Congregational Church, Pasadena, CA
- May 31-June 2--RENOVARÉ President's Circle Retreat, Red Lion Hotel/Jantzen Beach, Portland, OR
- June 15-16--Evangelicals for Social Action Student Conference, Philadelphia, PA

Growing Pains

Sorry we are late with this issue of RENOVARÉ Perspective. We were busy with all the details of the Local Conference held at First United Methodist, April 12-13 which, by the way, was a wonderful success. A total of 325 attended. We are now in the process of evaluating the gathering and setting up a local committee. They plan to establish a local expression and follow up on needs for Spiritual Formation Group participation.

Local expressions of RENOVARÉ have also been established in the Southeastern United States and in Costa Rica. Regional Directors are **Steve Harper**, based at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and **Don Lorenzo Long** who is with the Spanish Language Institute, San José.

We continue to work on the National Conference on Personal Spiritual Renewal in Pasadena, **October 23-26, 1991**. There are many details and logistics to care for yet. Continue to pray with us for God's blessing on this effort.

Our accountant has completed the 1990 fiscal year financial report. If you would like to have a copy, we would love to make that available. Please call or write the office for a copy.

Thank you, Devotional Reading subscribers, for your patience in waiting for the third quarter. Richard has had a busy speaking schedule this spring, and, with the Local Conference, we got swamped! We'll finish them as soon as we can.