

Perspective

Vol. 3, No. 3

Growing Edges

July, 1993

A kind of theme verse for us at RENOVARE is the great words of 2 Corinthians 4:16, "**So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.**" (The word translated "renewed" is "renovare" in the Latin Bible.) I like this passage for many reasons. I like its tenacity—"we do not lose heart." I like its realism—"our outer nature is wasting away." I like its optimism—we are "being renewed." I like its progression—our renewal occurs "day by day." But, most of all, I like its focus on the spiritual and invisible nature of the undertaking to which we are to give our lives. Let me fill in this last point a bit.

The Invisible Nature of the Spiritual

Renewal, in this passage, is concerned with the inner, spiritual nature of the person. Now, the outward person we can see, but the inward person we cannot see. Spiritual reality, for the most part, is invisible to human eyes. Just below this theme verse Paul notes, "we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen", and a little later he says, "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (4:18 and 5:7).

It is important for us to understand the invisible nature of spiritual reality so we can resist the trap of giving definitive significance to the material. God, for example, is invisible. I am always moved by the power of the second of the ten commandments which forbids us from making "graven images" of God. This commandment is directed specifically at the temptation to make the physical ultimate. It is a temptation we face almost daily in our interaction with contemporary culture, saturated as it is with an empirical mind set. "God is Spirit," declares Jesus, "and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). In writing to young Timothy, Paul breaks forth into doxology; "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

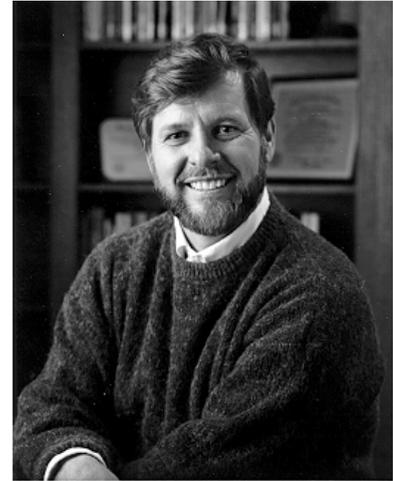
God's Great Graciousness

Now, the invisible nature of God is part of his great graciousness. You see, we have this perennial project of hiding from God. But God is so big that we could not hide from him unless he hid from us. God could have set up reality so that every morning we would wake up staring into the face of Omnipotence. But, instead, God cooperates with us so that we can hide from him. He has arranged spiritual reality in such a way that we cannot see it unless God wants us to see it. And God does not want us to see it until we want to see it . . . want to see it with all our hearts . . . long for it like the deer longing for flowing streams (Ps. 42:1).

Seeing the Invisible

And when we cry out with every fiber of our being, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," then, in time, there comes a seeing that is beyond sight. We enter into the experience of Moses who "persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). We begin to see a spiritual reality that others do not see. And we trust in that reality, betting our lives on it.

This is what the Bible means by faith. Faith involves an entering into the knowledge of the invisible, spiritual world and a living on the basis of that knowledge. And as we do this with regularity and persistence we will discover that "our inner nature is being renewed day by day."



Peace and joy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Richard J. Foster". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Richard J. Foster

Growing With Groups

One of the premises of the spiritual formation group strategy is that by engaging in spiritual exercises, we grow closer to God. Through these exercises (prayer, Bible reading, service, etc.) we place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.

Dallas Willard in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, points out that spiritual growth "will not be done for us, though in our effort we'll find gracious strength beyond ourselves." We are co-laborers with God. We do not simply wait passively for God to work.

Doing



But as I look at my own life, and listen to many of you who are involved in spiritual formation groups, I notice a tendency to focus on "doing things for God." For example, one group shared some frustration with a member who rarely fulfills the covenant. If this member plans to read a chapter of the Bible each night before bed, you can bet that next week the other members will hear, "Well, I just didn't find the time."

How should group members respond? Because they are holding each other accountable, is it their duty to point out this inconsistency, to share their frustration, perhaps to chastise this member?

Let's examine this. First, pointing out the failure of another rarely accomplishes any long term good. Why? Because it only provides a temporary, external motivation. Second, God is not as concerned with our doing as with our being. The way God works is from the inside out.

In John 15:5 Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Now notice: branches don't produce fruit, they bear fruit. No matter how hard a branch tries, no matter how many other branches stand by and encourage, that branch—by itself—can never produce any fruit.

Being



Spiritual exercises flow out of our being, not our doing. If I am aware that I am a child of God, unconditionally loved and accepted, a new creation, free from the power of sin, resting in who I am, then I will naturally bear fruit. If I am not producing fruit, the solution is not to try harder, to have others prod me more forcefully; the solution is to abide in Christ.

Paul proclaimed, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The life of Christ within us is a fact, not a wish, and that life produces a pressure and a power that enables us "to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done" (Foster). Sometimes we work, and sometimes we rest. Being led by the Spirit means letting God determine the agenda.

Focusing on who we are, not what we are doing, is the solution to the problem. As new creations (2 Cor. 5:17) we have been transformed, just as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. If, as butterflies, we still act like caterpillars (hanging out with the worms, doing wormy things) it is not because we are lazy, it is because we are not living out of our new identity in Christ. We are in error as to who we are, and what we need most of all is to come to the truth of who we are, and the truth will set us free.

Flying



As butterflies we are free to fly, but sometimes we forget who we are. The way the Holy Spirit chooses to shape my choices and actions is by a gentle reminder of my identity, not a sharp rebuke with a fear of judgment. Perhaps we would do well to encourage one another in the way God has chosen to encourage us.

James Bryan Smith

Going Deeper

Five years ago Jim Smith dreamed about developing an anthology of devotional classics. Three and one-half years ago people attending the Wichita Conference faithfully plunked down \$30.00 for the 52 readings after seeing a sample of only one! Talk about buying a pig in a poke! Printed on blue paper, distributed by mail, and bound in a three ring notebook, incredibly we sold over 1,000 copies of the Devotional Readings.

Available now in a new edition and format and renamed Devotional Classics, this publication retains its special appeal and usability. Like the original, each reading begins with a brief introduction to the author followed by excerpts from the devotional classic that has been abridged and updated for the modern reader. Then there is a selection of Scripture that goes along with the theme of the reading followed by study questions designed to encourage further reflection on both.

If the reader finds a particular author helpful and would like to read more of her or his writings, a section titled "Going Deeper," serves as a bibliography. Each selection concludes with a

reflection by Richard Foster that seeks to bridge the gulf between the ancient writer and the modern reader. We hope this new, more affordable edition continues to bless those who want to grow a deeper spiritual life.

Tapes on Holiness and Worship

Also this quarter we are featuring two tapes from talks originally delivered at the 1989 RENOVARÉ National Conference on Personal Spiritual Renewal. The first by Dallas Willard, "The Virtuous Life: The Substance of Holiness," explores what it means to live a holy life. To be response-able—able to respond—we must root ourselves in the reality of God and his kingdom where we find strength and power. Inward transformation, through a three-fold process, lies at the heart of moving "beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees."

Edward England's talk titled "The Spirit-Empowered Life" focuses on Christ-centered worship. Edward lists ten characteristics of the Spirit-empowered Christian and challenges us to add our own. He also gives some practical suggestions that can help us center our lives on the living Christ, bringing us to worship.

Growing Pains

Last month we sent a letter—actually a fleece—bringing to your attention two opportunities/challenges. We received numerous gifts including one specifically designated for the radio opportunity. We plan to start the spots as soon as scripts are ready and time is purchased.

Richard continues to explore relocating our office in the summer of 1994, hoping to reach a decision in early fall. Pray with us for wisdom as we consider all of the options and possibilities.

All 20,000 copies of the first printing of the Spiritual Formation Workbook sold out within a few weeks. It has now gone to second printing with delivery to the warehouse scheduled for mid July. Ample supplies for fall small groups will be available. **To order, call Greg or Jana at 316-722-7044.**

Our RENOVARÉ family enjoyed an outing on May 30, celebrating several events: birthdays, publications, anniversaries, and so on. We attended a Wichita Wranglers baseball game, and Richard spoke at the chapel for players. Ed Rea, Jana's husband, serves as chaplain to the team. It was fun getting better acquainted with each other and watching the Wranglers win over El Paso.