

Perspective

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Growing Edges

January, 1995

In this issue of the Perspective we are focusing on the Evangelical tradition—the Word-Centered life. In "Growing Together" Lynda Graybeal guides us through the maze of English translations and paraphrases of the Bible. Then in a special insert entitled "The Jogging Monk and the Exegesis of the Heart" Jim Smith shares his experience of learning to pray the Scripture.

The centrality of the Bible—*sola scriptura*—is a prominent aspect of the Evangelical tradition, and it is vital for us to work this message deep into our hearts. Sometimes I think that many of the controversies over the Bible arise because it is easier for us to debate the Bible than it is to submit to it.

A Well of Wisdom

Let me tell you about a little experiment I am having right now with Scripture. For a time I am giving attention to the wisdom literature, particularly focusing on the book of Proverbs. After reading some background material, I went through Proverbs slowly, highlighting random sayings that struck me for one reason or another. (It is possible to do this with Proverbs because this genre is meant, for the most part, to be taken as independent wise sayings. This approach is not appropriate, for example, with historical books, or prophetic writings, or pastoral epistles, where logical progression and contextual considerations are crucial.) I did this reading on a plane flight from Denver to New York and back.

Next I put these individual proverbs on 3x5 note cards. Now, every morning during a brief twenty-minute time of stretching exercises, I ruminate on one of those proverbs. I may stay with a single proverb for several days or even weeks. I make no attempt to memorize them, though their very structure makes retention easy.

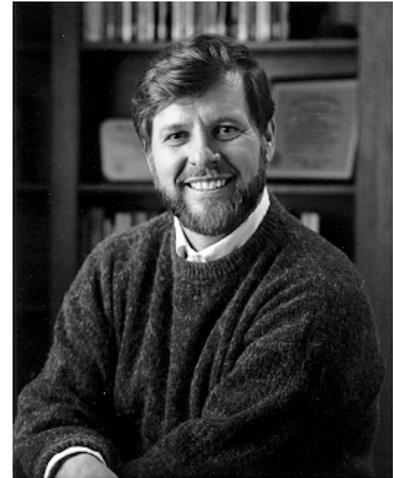
Sample Insights

I have been struck by many things through this little exercise. For one thing I am interested in the number of times wisdom is connected in one way or another with prudence, e.g. "I wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion" (8:12). Prudence, as you may know, is one of the four cardinal virtues that forms the cornerstone of Greek wisdom writings. In essence it refers to good common sense—"horse sense" as we used to say. And to have this connected with the Hebrew notion of *sophia*—wisdom—well, it is intriguing.

Then I am impressed with how some proverbs make no moral judgments whatever—they are descriptive rather than prescriptive. For example, 22:7 reads, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." The sage states this as a simple fact of life, refusing to comment on whether this fact is good or bad, right or wrong. This perspective is useful because it is so easy for us to turn the Proverbs into exacting rules that proscribe every aspect of our lives.

Values Transformation

Over lunch yesterday I shared my little experiment with a friend. He asked me how this process leads me closer to God or to experience Jesus more fully. It is a good question for ultimately this is the goal. But at present I have no adequate answer to his question. For now it is enough to soak in the wisdom of the ages, for somehow its perspective is slowly, slowly changing what I value.



Peace and joy,

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

Richard J. Foster

Growing Together

John Wycliffe (fourteenth century) distinguished himself by preaching in his native English to the ordinary person and translating the Scriptures into that language. In the sixteenth century William Tyndale translated the entire New Testament into English and a substantial portion of the Old Testament. Myles Coverdale was the first person to publish the entire Bible in English, but, by the middle of the seventeenth century the King James Version (KJV)—published in 1611—became the dominant translation.

Steadily displacing its rivals, the KJV or Authorized Version (AV) became the standard by which all other efforts were measured. However, in the nineteenth century the recovery of ancient manuscripts and papyri accelerated rapidly while the English language developed and changed continuously. These factors launched efforts to revise the Authorized Version and publish entirely new translations.

The dawn of the twentieth century saw one major English effort finished—the Revised Version (RV) completed in 1885—and an American revision of it in process—the American Standard Version (ASV) published in 1901. Since then we have seen numerous translations (attempting to match word for word the meaning of the original text) and paraphrases (attempting to match the meaning of the original text by using phrases common to everyday language). Each version has its strengths and weaknesses and place in the community of faith. Below are some of the English versions available accompanied by a brief annotation.

The Living Bible (LB)

A paraphrase of English translations by Kenneth Taylor that is checked against ancient texts for accuracy. More wordy than its sources, it uses idioms and expressions common to the U.S. and a limited vocabulary for clarity and understandability. Text divided into paragraphs with a minimum of verse notations. Excellent for reading out loud to children.

The Message (TM)

Translation/paraphrase of the New Testament and Psalms by Eugene Peterson whose work is being compared to J. B. Phillips' pioneering effort. (Eugene is presently translating the rest of the Old Testament. He works from the standard Greek and Hebrew texts.) Like Koine Greek—the language of the New Testament—this version specializes in "street" speech (without its vulgarities) that is peculiar to the U.S. No verse notations other than at the beginning of chapters and major sections. Tends to be wordy but excellent for devotional and contemporary use.

New American Standard Version (NASV)

A second generation (ASV the first), modified literal translation undertaken by the Lockman Foundation. Evangelical in approach, the style is viewed by some language specialists as rather wooden and awkward. Prints each verse as a new section or paragraph with the number notation at the left. Excels as a study and comparison Bible.

New International Version (NIV)

A completely new translation sponsored by the International Bible Society. Over one hundred Evangelical scholars worked from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts to insure accuracy. Maintains verse notations while text is divided into paragraphs. Good for study and as a bridge between a modified literal translation and a paraphrase.

The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

An update of the original Jerusalem Bible (JB) that was translated into English from a French translation of original languages. Used by Roman Catholics as an alternative to the Douay Bible and RSV. With Apocrypha. A very readable and unique version. Good for new insights into familiar texts and for comparison with other versions.

New King James Version (NKJV)

Retains the poetic style and beauty of the original but updates words that have changed meaning. The revisers consulted recovered manuscripts and papyri in order to refine the version. Unfortunately, it does not incorporate the newest research into textural accuracy. Maintains a separate paragraph for each verse. A good version for those who love "the King's English" and the original KJV but have difficulty with the archaic words.

The Revised English Bible (REB)

A revision of The New English Bible printed in its final form in 1970. Published by Oxford and Cambridge University presses, the translation scholars did a verse-by-verse comparison with the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic writings. Its style reflects English usage in the United Kingdom. All verses are noted and text is divided into paragraphs. Available with or without Apocrypha and makes a good Bible for the person looking for a non-U.S. translation.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Third generation translation (ASV and Revised Standard Version [RSV] its predecessors) that uses gender neutral language for humanity and masculine pronouns for Deity. Sponsored by the National Council of Churches, it reflects current English usage in the U.S. Verse notations do not intrude on text that is divided into paragraphs. Useful for study and devotion.

Lynda L. Graybeal

The following article by James Bryan Smith (a/k/a Jim Smith!) originally appeared in *Christianity Today* (July 22, 1991, pp. 29-31) and was condensed by Richard J. Foster in *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (pp. 143-45). However, because of its relevance to our focus this month—the Word-Centered Life—we are reprinting the entire article with the hope it can help those who are struggling with getting beyond studying the Bible purely as a cognitive exercise to letting its message and transforming power sink deep into the heart.

The Jogging Monk and the Exegesis of the Heart

During my second year of seminary, the spiritual moorings of my life came loose. Earlier, before starting seminary, I had asked the spiritual writer Henri Nouwen which one would best nurture my spiritual life. "None of them," he responded. "That will be mostly up to you."

After a year and a half, I learned the truth of his words. I decided to go on a five-day silent retreat at a Northeastern Episcopalian monastery to try to reclaim the spiritual warmth I had somehow lost.

Upon arrival I was assigned a monk who would be my spiritual director for one hour each day. He walked into our meeting room with jogging clothes underneath his cowl. I was disappointed. I had been expecting an elderly man, bearded to his knees, who would penetrate my soul with searing blue eyes. Instead, I got "the jogging monk."

My director gave me only one task for the day: meditate on the story of the Annunciation in the first chapter of Luke's gospel. I walked back to my cell, wondering how I would occupy my time with only this one assignment. After all, I thought to myself, I could exegete this entire text in a few hours. What was I to do for the rest of the day—in silence?

Back at my cell I opened my Bible to the passage and began reading. "Birth narrative," I muttered to myself. For the next hour I spliced and diced the verses as any good exegete would do, ending up with a few hypotheses and several hours to sit in silence. As the hours passed, the room seemed to get smaller. There was no view to the outside through the window of my room. Other rooms, I would come to find, had a beautiful view of the river that flowed adjacent to the monastery. Without any view to the outer world, I was forced to look within. Despite my hopes of finding spiritual bliss, I never felt more alone.

What Else Is There?

The next day I met with the monk again to discuss my spiritual life. He asked what had happened with the assigned text. I told him it was just shy of disaster in terms of profound spiritual revelations but that I had come up with a few exegetical insights. I thought my discoveries might impress him.

They didn't.

"What was your aim in reading this passage?" he asked.

"My aim? To arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the text, I suppose."

"Anything else?"

I paused. "No. What else is there?"

"Well, there's more than just finding out what it says and what it means. There are also questions like, What did it teach you? What did it say to you? Were you struck by anything? And most importantly, Did you experience God in your reading?"

He assigned the same text for the next day, asking me to begin reading it not so much with my head but more with my heart.

I had no idea how to do this. For the first three hours I tried and failed repeatedly. I practically had the passage memorized and still it was lifeless, and I was bored. The room seemed even smaller, and by nightfall I thought I would go deaf from the silence.

The next day we met again. In despair I told him that I simply could not do what he was asking. It was then that the wisdom beneath the jogging clothes became evident: "You're trying too hard, Jim. You're trying to control God. You're running the show. Go back and read this passage again. But this time, be open to receive whatever God has for you. Don't manipulate God; just receive. Communion with him isn't something you institute. It's like sleep. You can't make yourself sleep, but you can create the conditions that allow sleep to happen. All I want you to do is create the conditions: open your Bible, read it slowly, listen to it, and reflect on it."

I went back to my cell (it had a prisonlike feel by now) and began to read. I found utter silence. After an hour I finally shouted, "I give up! You win!" though I am not certain at whom I was shouting. I slumped over in my chair and began to weep. I suspect it was for my failure that God had been waiting.

Let It Be to Me

A short time later I picked up the Bible and read the passage again. The words looked different despite their familiarity. My mind and heart were supple as I read. I was no longer trying to figure out the meaning or the main point of the passage. I was simply hearing it.

My eyes fell upon the famous words of Mary, "Let it be to me according to your word," her response to God's stunning promise that she would give birth to his son. Let it be to me. The words rang in my head. And then God spoke to me. Some might say it was "all in my head" or "just my imagination," but how else does God speak?

It was as if a window had been thrown open and God was suddenly present, like a friend who wanted to talk. What followed was a dialogue about the story in Luke, about God, about Mary, and about me. I wondered about Mary—her feelings, her doubts, her fears, and her incredible willingness to respond to God's request.

This prompted me to ask (or the Spirit moved me to ask) about the limits of my obedience which seemed meager in comparison to Mary's. "Do not be afraid," said the angel to Mary. We talked about fear? What was I afraid of? What held me back?

"You have found favor with God," the angel told Mary. Had I found favor with God? I sensed that I had, but not because of anything I had done (humility had become my companion in that room). I had found favor because I was his child.

I wondered, too, about the future, about my calling. What was God wanting of me? Mary had just been informed of her destiny. What was mine? We talked about what might

be—what, in fact, could be, if I were willing. If I were willing.

Like Augustine who turned to the Scriptures after hearing a voice say, "Take up and read," I had reached the end of my rope and was, for the first time in a long time, in a position to hear. There is much to be said for desperation as desperation led me to begin praying. My prayer was really a plea: help me. After an hour of reflecting and listening, Mary's "Let it be to me according to your word" eventually became my prayer. The struggle had ended. I had a feeling that I had just lost control of my life, but in that same moment, had finally found my life.

The room that had seemed small now seemed spacious. The fact that there was no view no longer mattered. The view was wonderful from my vantage point. The silence no longer mattered, no longer made me anxious, but rather, seemed peaceful. And the terrible feeling of being alone was replaced by a sense of closeness with a God who was "nearer to me than I was to myself."

The Word Exposed In the Words

Before my retreat, I would have laughed if someone had tried to tell me that my real problem was not prayer or meditation or personal discipline, but that it was my inability to read the Bible. After all, to me, an evangelical with a touch of Wesleyan pietism, the Bible was sacred. I had memorized 2 Timothy 3:16 early on as a Christian. When Carl F. H. Henry had come to speak to us at Yale Divinity School on the authority of the Scriptures (Daniel in the lion's den?), I stood by him and championed his cause.

I had studied under brilliant Bible scholars and maintained a high view of authority and inspiration. Even my Bible could attest to the hours I labored to understand it, covered as it was with marginal notes and multicolored "highlighter" markings. Like Paul, I list my achievement to point a finger not at me but at the God who redirected my ways.

Quite simply, I had forgotten that there is much more to reading the Bible than merely understanding the words on the pages. Karl Barth wrote of how "the Word is exposed in the words." It was as if the Word—strong and pure, convicting and yet strengthening—now emerged from the words.

Learning how to study the Bible was an important and essential skill. However, I had lost "the ears to hear" anything beyond that kind of study.

I say "lost" because there was a time when I had ears that heard. I was given my first Bible at the age of sixteen and I remember vividly how I read the Gospels with a kind of awe, hearing the words as if they were spoken to me. Somewhere along the way I lost those ears, and it took a monk in jogging shoes and a Jonahlike three days of anguish in the belly of a monastery to get them back.

What I relearned in my room without a view was how the Bible should be read, namely, with an ear to what the text might be saying to me. Simply doing responsible exegesis is not enough, as enlightening as it often is. The next steps are listening to the text, reflecting on it, asking not merely what it means, but what it is asking of me, what it is asking me to hear.

What I had been unable to understand was what Søren Kierkegaard called the "contemporaneity" of the Bible. The

past does not merely parallel but actually intersects the present. The Christ who called his disciples to follow him is calling each of us at this moment. I had been reading the Bible as if it were describing a world in which I might find parallels. I now came to understand that when I read the Bible, I am reading about a world that in some sense also now is.

For example, I had been prone to read the story of God's call to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac by saying, "Boy, Abraham sure had a tough decision. I am glad I am not in his shoes." Now I see that I cannot read it only that way. Why? Because I am in Abraham's shoes. God sometimes calls me to sacrifice my most precious possession. The story has much to say to the present.

I had to relearn that the Bible is a book aimed primarily at the will of the reader. I was afraid to hear what the Bible might say because I suspected it might ask me to change my life. It did. When I was "running the show," as the monk observed, I could sidestep the contemporaneity of the Bible. Mary was Mary, and I could observe her dilemma and even write a good sermon about it. But now it was my dilemma. Could I—will I—say, "let it be to me?"

Finally, I relearned that reading the Bible requires what the saints of old called "contemplation." It was in solitude and silence that the noise and hurry of the world finally ceased long enough for me to hear. There was not enough silence in my life for me to hear the Word within the words, and I knew that deep down, which is why I went on a silent retreat in the first place. Now I have learned that silence is possible outside the haven of a monastery, but I still have to work to find it.

I also learned that contemplation is more than just silence. The monk's insistence that I stay with the same passage for three days unnerved me. Now I understand what he was trying to do. Contemplation requires deep reflection, repetition, patience, and persistence. The veil that covered my heart would not be removed by a single reading. I needed then, and still need, to read it slowly, until the words strike a chord within me. Once they strike, I am able to let them resonate.

A New World Opens Up

The end of the retreat was much better than the beginning. My "jogging monk" was pleased to see that I had relearned how to read the Bible. He gave me different passages to meditate on for the remainder of the retreat, and, like Mary, I was able to "ponder" them in my heart. I felt what an illiterate person must feel on learning how to read. A new world opened up.

Seminary, too, became more of a joy. I finished that year and my final year with a new way of looking at the Bible. I found that there can be a happy marriage between textual study and contemplation, viewing them not as competing but complementary. One without the other feels incomplete. Now, five years later, I feel that any day on which I do not open the Bible and let the words descend from my head into my heart, letting them mold my thoughts and shape my prayers, is wasted.

Unlike the room at the monastery, I now have a beautiful view outside my window. Now and then I close the shades.

James Bryan Smith

Going Deeper

The Message: Psalms

In the original Hebrew, the Psalms are rough, raw expressions of passionate feeling—anger, joy, grief, praise, remorse—straight from the heart. Eugene Peterson's translation/paraphrase, *The Message: Psalms*, recaptures these emotions and invites us to experience the original power of the songs.

Peterson writes that the Psalms are "the prayers of men and women passionate for God." He helps us understand their message by using the idioms and language of the streets—rich, lyrical, alive, colorful—indigenous to U.S. culture. Once we understand their meaning, we can move beyond the words and into prayer. "Peterson's Psalms seethes with anger and shimmers with joy. You cannot just read it; you are compelled to pray it and live it" (Brock and Bodie Thoene, authors of *The Zion Chronicles*).

Discipleship

This book distills and preserves the spiritual insights of a community of Christians known as the Hutterian Brethren that arose in central Germany in the early part of this century. Seeking "to live in full community of goods on the basis of Acts 2 and 4 and the Sermon on the Mount" they continue to this day with six of their communities in the United States.

The book itself is simply selections from the letters, sermons, and papers of J. Heinrich Arnold grouped around various themes such as discipleship, forgiveness, world suffering, and more. But do not let the simplicity of this format fool you, for as Henri Nouwen says in the foreword, "Discipleship is a tough book. As I began reading it, (the) words touched me as a double-edged sword, calling me to choose between truth and lies, salvation and sin, selflessness and selfishness, light and darkness, God and demon."

The editors clearly distinguish *Discipleship* from the majority of pulp devotional writings in our day when they say, "This is not a collection of devotions or meditations, not a 'feel-good' journal about walking with God, and not a guide for self-improvement or personal spiritual growth. It is, very simply, a book about discipleship—about following Christ humbly, obediently, and with an open heart."

I close with one sample of Arnold's openings onto truth, "The main thing for you should be to recognize the greatness of God and to live for him. . . . Then you will see how very small the search for personal happiness is."

Going Places

Dates	Event	Location	Staff	Contact & Phone
1/9/95- 1/14/95	Lead Retreats for Staff and Faculty	Azusa Pacific University	Richard Foster	
1/15/95	Reading and Book Signing	The Tattered Cover 1628 16th Street Denver, CO 80202	Richard Foster	Nancy Dalton 303-322-7727
1/22/95	RENOVARÉ Open House 3:00-5:00 PM	8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102 Englewood, CO 80112-5609	Staff of RENOVARÉ	Phil Graybeal 303-792-0152
1/25/95- 1/27/95	Wiley Lecture Series	Point Loma Nazarene College 3900 Lomaland Drive San Diego, CA 92106-2899	Richard Foster	Frank G. Carver 619-221-2200
1/28/95	Retreat for Lay Pastors	Skyline Wesleyan Church	Richard Foster	
2/10/95- 2/12/95	Workshop for Pastors, Meeting for Lay People, Sunday morning service, Concert of Prayer	Front Line Ministries P. O. Box 786 Corvallis, OR 97339	Richard Foster	Tom White 503-654-1345
3/10/95	Speak in Chapel	Eastern Nazarene College 23 East Elm Avenue Wollaston, MA 02170	Richard Foster	Michael Schutz 617-773-6350, Ex. 206
3/10/95- 3/11/95	RENOVARÉ Regional Conference	Eastern Nazarene College 23 East Elm Avenue Wollaston, MA 02170	Richard Foster Jim Smith	Michael Schutz 617-773-6350, Ex. 206
3/20/95- 3/22/95	RENOVARÉ Retreat	Glen Eyrie Conference Center P. O. Box 6000 Colorado Springs, CO 80934-6000	Roger Fredrikson	Registrar at 1-800-944-4536 or fax 719-594-2244
3/24/95- 3/26/95	RENOVARÉ Retreat	Heartland Presbyterian Center 16965 Northwest 45 Highway Parkville, MO 64152	Richard Foster	Chuck or Joyce Olsen 816-891-1078
3/30/95- 4/2/95	Retreat	Aqueduct Conference Center P. O. Box 17299 Chapel Hill, NC 27516-7299	Richard Foster	Tom Tyson 919-933-5557
4/7/95- 4/8/95	RENOVARÉ Regional Conference	Community Baptist Church 9090 19th Street Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91701	Richard Foster Jim Smith	Diane Austin 909-945-5001, Ex. 111
4/9/95	Preach	Community Baptist Church 9090 19th Street Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91701	Richard Foster	Diane Austin 909-987-8594, Ex. 111
4/18/95- 4/21/95	Academic Teaching	Azusa Pacific University	Richard Foster	
4/28/95- 4/28/95	RENOVARÉ Regional Conference	White Plains United Methodist Church 303 SE Maynard Road Cary, NC 27512	Richard Foster Jim Smith	Raleigh Baptist Association 919-231-3995
5/15/95- 5/24/95	Academic Teaching	Azusa Pacific University	Richard Foster	
6/19/95- 7/12/95	Trip to Australia and New Zealand		Richard Foster	

Growing Pains

Although our newsletters are being mailed in Wichita, Kansas, our office is at 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO, Tel. 303-792-0152.