

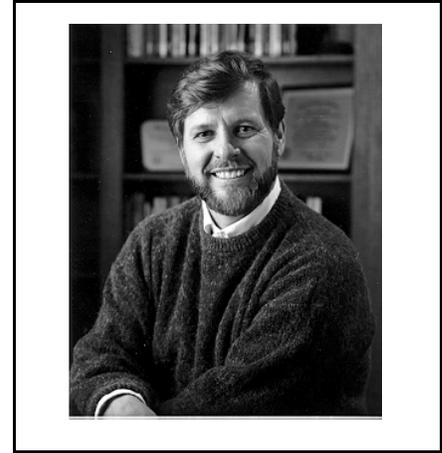
January 1998

Growing Edges

Dear Friends,

Twenty years ago HarperSanFrancisco published a book by an unknown writer—Richard J. Foster—titled *Celebration of Discipline*. It received little marketing and less publicity until readers started recommending it to their friends. The rest, as they say, is history. Selling steadily and continuously since then, it has been translated from English into fourteen languages with more than one and one-half million copies sold worldwide.

As more than two people read each copy, *Celebration of Discipline* has had a positive influence on the lives of countless people. Richard receives letters from people around the world who relate how it has helped them in their daily walk with God. I talk with graduates of seminaries and colleges who have studied it in spiritual formation and devotional life classes. It has remained a best-seller for HarperSanFrancisco, and to celebrate its longevity and popularity, Harpers has given *Celebration* a new dust jacket, and Richard has written an introduction (see excerpt on pages 3-4). As you may have guessed by now, we are featuring this 20th Anniversary Edition—along with two companion books, *A Study Guide for Celebration of Discipline* and *Celebrating the Disciplines*—on page 5. But before you turn to those pages, I want to share with you why I feel *Celebration of Discipline* is a must read for everyone who wants to grow spiritually.



Richard Foster

Timeless and Accessible

The classic Spiritual Disciplines Richard names in *Celebration*—meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration—are timeless. They have been practiced by people of the Book—Jewish and Christian—for centuries, and they continue to be essential for a full life in the kingdom. Their practice prepares us “to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done,” and, as we integrate them, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” overcome us (Gal. 5:22).

Richard not only names the classic Disciplines of the spirit, but makes them accessible to us through his simple yet profound writing. We don’t need a college education to understand why we should do them and how to get started. He emphasizes that they are for everyone—not just the religious or clergy—and that we can do the Disciplines right now, right where we are, smack in the middle of our jobs and our families, our churches and our communities.

Intentional and Grace-full

In *Celebration* Richard also prompts us to be intentional about our Christian life, giving us something to do by working *with* God on our spiritual growth rather than by simply sitting on our hands and waiting *for* God to rescue us from a world gone bad. To be intentional about practicing the Disciplines is to do them—knowing that we change incrementally, not in giant leaps—and to be persistent—recognizing that spiritual growth takes time.

Lastly, *Celebration of Discipline* is full of grace. We are not condemned for trying and failing. We are not even made to feel guilty if we don’t try. Richard introduces us to the Disciplines in a way that makes us *want* to incorporate them into our lives so that we can become like Christ. He leads us to be proactive rather than reactive; we learn to train rather than merely to try. Won’t you join me as I continue to study *Celebration* and to do the Disciplines?

Blessings,

Lynda L. Graybeal

Growing Together

The exercises below are taken from *Celebrating the Disciplines: A Journal Workbook to Accompany Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Yanni (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992). You should read the corresponding chapter of *Celebration of Discipline* prior to doing the exercises.

Chapter 1, The Spiritual Disciplines: The Disciplines are means to receiving Divine grace, not exercises in self-improvement. As you begin your journey through the Spiritual Disciplines, affirm God's presence with you and ask him to refresh your perspective on why it is important to practice the Disciplines.

Chapter 2, The Discipline of Meditation: Identify a particular place that provides a setting of beauty and spend thirty minutes there, contemplating all the ways in which you can see God's gifts in it. Or, simply be silent and listen for what God may have to communicate to you. If you desire to, take along a notebook and write down your thoughts.

Chapter 3, The Discipline of Prayer: This chapter primarily focuses on the prayer of *intercession*—asking God to supply the needs of others. Set aside five to ten minutes each day to practice listening for guidance as a prelude to intercessory prayer.

Chapter 4, The Discipline of Fasting: Fast from something that does not involve food—for example, the entertainment media, passing judgment on yourself or others, people (to experience solitude), impulsive speech, printed media.

Chapter 5, The Discipline of Study: Choose a brief selection from a book and practice the four steps of repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Ask yourself, "Do I read to be changed by the truth or to avoid doing the truth?"

Chapter 6, The Discipline of Simplicity: Monitor your attitudes and behavior regarding material possessions as you encounter them in your daily activities this week. Write down your observations in your journal.

Chapter 7, The Discipline of Solitude: Look for "little solitudes" among the ordinary experiences of your week. Write down in journal entries when and where you found opportunities, how you spent them, and what difference they made in your day or week.

Chapter 8, The Discipline of Submission: Make a list of opportunities you have in the course of daily living to give up your own rights for the good of others, and choose one opportunity on which to act this week. Afterward, reflect on how this practice of submission helped free you from the need or desire to have things go the way you want.

Chapter 9, The Discipline of Service: Look for an opportunity to bear another's burdens this week—for example, help . . . a child who is experiencing some personal disappointment . . . a friend or loved one whose anxieties could be lightened by your attentive care . . . a lonely person who needs a visit . . . someone who could use a helping hand.

Chapter 10, The Discipline of Confession: Be alert to needs or opportunities to practice the Discipline of confession (whether giving or receiving) without forcing them into expression. In the Corporate Disciplines it is especially important to draw on relationships with others—a spiritual mentor, a fellowship group, close friends, and so on—since these Disciplines cannot be practiced in isolation from other people.

Chapter 11, The Discipline of Worship: If you are dissatisfied with your participation in corporate worship at this point in your life, choose a trusted friend or mentor who will listen to your concerns and reflect back to you any helpful comments or questions which will direct you toward appropriate paths for growth in this area.

Chapter 12, The Discipline of Guidance: Think of someone with whom you might want to develop an ongoing relationship of mutual spiritual direction. Take him or her out to lunch to get better acquainted.

Chapter 13, The Discipline of Celebration: Pick one creative activity to do with family or friends: throw a party for any reason—or for no reason; play a game, indoors or outdoors, playact an event or satirize your usual routine and patterns; and so on.

The *RENOVARÉ Perspective* is published quarterly by the not-for-profit corporation RENOVARÉ, Inc. Organized under the laws of the State of Kansas, it is registered in Colorado as RENOVARÉ Ministries, Inc. Permission to duplicate this newsletter for free distribution is granted. Any quotations or references to it should give proper credit to RENOVARÉ, 8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112-5624 USA.

An annual, tax deductible gift of \$15.00 is welcome to help cover publishing expenses. If you cannot help, we understand. Some will be able to give more and in this way the unity of the Body of Christ will be maintained.

Three Influences

by Richard J. Foster

(The following is an excerpt from the introduction to the 20th Anniversary Edition of *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

It is a wonder to me how God uses squiggles on paper to do his work in the hearts and minds of people. How are these squiggles transformed into letters and words and sentences, and finally, meaning? Oh, we may congratulate ourselves on knowing a little about the function of neurotransmitters in the brain or about how endorphin proteins affect learning and memory retention, but if we are honest, we know that thinking itself is a mystery. Doxology is the only appropriate response.

At this writing, it has been two decades since the particular set of squiggles titled *Celebration of Discipline* was first published. After the first decade the publisher, no doubt puzzled by its longevity and popularity, wanted to celebrate this milestone, and asked me to revise the original text—which I was glad to do. And now, after a second decade the puzzle continues. Somehow (who can ever explain how?) people continue to find help in their daily walk with God through its pages.

To celebrate this twentieth anniversary the publisher has asked me to write an introduction, and, again, I am glad to comply. And perhaps in fulfilling their request it is appropriate to tell how the book, *Celebration of Discipline*, came into being.

Spiritual Bankruptcy

Fresh out of seminary, I was ready to conquer the world. My first appointment was a small church in a thriving region of Southern California. “Here,” I mused, “is my chance to show the denominational leadership, nay, the whole world what I can do.” Believe me, visions of far more than sugar plums were dancing in my head. I was sobered a bit when the former pastor, upon learning of my appointment, put his arm on my shoulder and said, “Well, Foster, it’s your turn to be in the desert!” But the “sobering” lasted only a moment. “This church will become a shining light set on a hill. The people will literally flood in.” This I thought, and this I believed.

After three months or so I had given that tiny congregation everything I knew, and then some, and it had done them no good. I had nothing left to give. I was spiritually bankrupt and I knew it. So much for a “shining light on a hill.”

My problem was more than having something to say from Sunday to Sunday. My problem was that what I did say had no power to help people. I had no substance, no depth. The people were starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give them. Nothing.

Three Converging Influences

In the wisdom of God, however, three influences were converging in that little church that would change the direction of my ministry, indeed, of my whole life. Together they would provide the depth and the substance I needed personally and the depth and the substance that, in time, would lead to the penning of *Celebration*. But that is running ahead of my story.

The first thing to happen was precipitated by an influx of genuinely needy people into our small congregation. They simply flowed in like streams after a thunderstorm. Oh, how they hungered for spiritual substance and, oh, how willing they were to do almost anything to find it. Now, these were the castoffs of today’s fast track culture—“the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on”—and so their neediness was quite obvious. Just as obvious was my inability to give them substantive pastoral care.

This lack of any real spiritual density led me, almost instinctively, to the Devotional Masters of the Christian faith—Augustine of Hippo and Francis of Assisi and Julian of Norwich and so many others. Somehow I sensed that these ancient writers lived and breathed the spiritual substance these new friends in our little fellowship were seeking so desperately.

To be sure, I had encountered many of these writers in academic settings, but that was a detached, cerebral kind of reading. Now, I read with different eyes, for daily I was working with heart-breaking, soul-crushing, gut-wrenching human need. These “saints,” as we sometimes call them, knew God in a way that I clearly did not. They experienced Jesus as the defining reality of their lives. They possessed a flaming vision of God that blinded them to all competing loyalties. They experienced life built on the Rock.

It hardly mattered who I read in those days—Brother Lawrence’s *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*, John Woolman’s *Journal*, A. W. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy*—they knew God in ways far beyond anything I had ever experienced. Or even wanted to experience! But as I continued to soak in the stories of these women and men who were aflame with the fire of divine love, I began desiring this kind of life for myself. And desiring led to seeking and seeking led to finding. And what I found settled me, deepened me, thickened me.

The second influence came from an individual in that tiny congregation, Dr. Dallas Willard. A philosopher by

profession, Dallas was well versed in the classics, and, at the same time, had an uncanny perception into the contemporary scene. He taught our fledgling little group: studies in Romans and Acts and the Sermon on the Mount and the Spiritual Disciplines and more. But regardless of the specific topic he constantly drew us into the big picture. It was life-based teaching which always respected the classical sources and always sought to give them contemporary expression. Those teachings gave me the *Weltanschauung*, the world view, upon which I could synthesize all my academic and biblical training.

But it wasn't just the teaching, or at least it wasn't teaching as we usually think of teaching. It was a heart-to-heart communication that went on between this world class philosopher and that little rag tag band of Christ's disciples. Dallas taught us right in the midst of our struggles, our hurts, our fears. He had descended with the mind into the heart and taught out of that deep center.

Today, many years later, I still revel in the impact of those teaching/living/praying sessions. It was, of course, teaching-in-community. We were in each other's homes; laughing together, weeping together, learning together, praying together. Some of the best teaching times grew out of the dynamic of those home settings where we might go late into the night—posing questions, debating issues, applying gospel truth to life's circumstances. Dallas would move among us, teaching, always teaching. A spiritual charism of teaching, I think. Teaching with wisdom. Teaching with passion. Teaching with heart. And always we experienced a sense of the numinous.

The third influence came initially from a Lutheran pastor, William Luther Vaswig. (With a name like "William Luther Vaswig" how could he pastor anything but a Lutheran church?) Bill's church, large and influential, overshadowed our tiny Quaker fellowship. But what drew me to Bill had nothing to do with "large" or "influential" or even "Lutheran." No, what I saw was someone thirsting for the things of God. So I sought him out. "Bill," I said, "you know more about prayer than I do. Would you teach me everything you know?"

Now, the way Bill taught me about prayer was by praying. Lively, honest, heart-felt, soul-searching, hilarious praying. As we did this, over time we began experiencing that "sweet sinking into Deity" Madame Guyon speaks of. It, very honestly, had much the same "feel" and "smell" as the experiences I had been reading about in the Devotional Masters.

This movement into prayer was actually a two-pronged influence. My praying experiences with Bill were augmented by those of a wonderfully determined woman,

Beth Shapiro, who was the head of the elders for our little fellowship. Beth was a nurse at a large hospital, and after working the night shift, she would come over to our small church building in the early morning and we, Beth and I, would spend an hour or two, praying for people. All kinds of people. People in our fellowship and people outside our fellowship. Whomever and whomever, Beth would want to pray for them.

Then we would often discuss issues of theology, of faith, of life. And whatever we talked about Beth tested out at the hospital. If we discussed the Bible's teaching on "the laying on of hands," at work Beth would put her hands through the holes of an incubator and place them on a premature infant, praying silently and lovingly, and watch that little one increase in health and well-being. These were the kinds of things Beth would do, not just now and again, but repeatedly. Through Beth I learned the necessity of bringing spiritual realities into the press of raw humanity.

Now, these three influences converged in those days of my young pastoring, and the result was a quiet revolution, inside and out. And in our fellowship of needy seekers we were experimenting with everything we were learning. Those were heady days, for we sensed we were on to something of enormous significance. We were hammering out on the hard anvil of daily life all that appeared years later in *Celebration of Discipline*. But, these influences, by themselves, did not move me into actual writing. More was needed. . . . (The rest of the introduction discusses Three Empowering Catalysts and Three Divine Providences.)

What then, I ask you, is this book really? Nothing but squiggles on paper. But through the grace of God it has been used, for these twenty years, as an instrument for human transformation. For this I thank God. And what of its future? That I gladly leave in the hands of Divine Providence. *Soli Deo Gloria*.



Since writing *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster has written four full-length books which promote personal spiritual renewal including *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. From his base in Denver, Colorado, where he and Carolynn live, Richard travels throughout the world, speaking and teaching on the spiritual life.