

Celebrating our 20th Anniversary

RENOVARÉ

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Perspective

## GROWING EDGES

### Dear Friends,

Why do we read the Bible? The question is not as ridiculous as it sounds. The way we read any book, and what we discover as a result, is largely determined by the attitudes and questions we bring to it. I have recently been reading *Moby Dick*, and have greatly enjoyed Herman Melville's flourishing turns of phrase, leisurely meanderings around tangential topics, and gripping narrative action. But my reading experience would have been very different if I had approached the book as an abridging editor looking for material to excise, or a literary critic evaluating the text's quality and value, or even as a cetologist researching the historical understanding of whales!



### More Than a Text Book

Equally, there are many different ways of approaching the Bible: as a window into ancient Middle Eastern culture and history; as a mine of proof texts or promises; as a resource for fashioning a systematic theology; even as a religious equivalent of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* from which to extract inspirational thoughts. In their new book, *Life with God* (which we are featuring in this issue of *Perspective*), Richard Foster and Kathy Helmers helpfully remind us, though, that the Bible has a more fundamental purpose: God uses our reading of Scripture as a primary means of spiritual formation.

The Bible is far more than a resource text, which we can use to shape our theology or ethics. It is God's living and active voice, and every time we open its covers we expose ourselves to the possibility of a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. As Richard and Kathy put it: "the Bible creates meeting places for human spirit and Divine spirit." God desires not only to *teach* us through Scripture, but also to *meet* us there. And so we need to read with understanding; studying the text, reaching deeply into the context and intention of the human authors, immersing ourselves in the thought-world of Scripture so its message permeates us fully. But we need also to read with the heart, giving attention to the voice of the ever-present Spirit speaking to us *now* through these ancient words and seeking to be open to his delightful invitation to continual renewal through God's loving grace. We must learn how to practice the "presence of God" in our reading of God's word.

### In Scripture We Find Christ

Of course, this profoundly affects the way we read. Many of us have been taught to come to the Bible primarily as a source of information; we come seeking principles which we can then translate into practice in our daily life of discipleship. And this, of course, is perfectly valid. What we have less often been taught is how to approach Scripture as a source of formation, to which we come seeking a person: the person of Christ. I have greatly enjoyed reading *Moby Dick*—but how different my reading would have been if I had expected, through the pages of the book, somehow to be brought into contact with Ishmael the whaler, or Melville himself! Perhaps my main incentive for reading would have been changed, alive with the anticipation of that

encounter. Certainly I would have come with a keener attention, a mind tuned to ask rather different questions, an eye noticing details that would otherwise have been missed.

In just the same way, my reading of the Bible can-should-be charged with the same sense of expectancy. These are not just words about God; they are the words of God, his living voice speaking into my Spirit-steeped heart and calling me into a transforming relationship with him. To read this book is to be immersed in God's truth, but also in God's very presence. Why do we read the Bible? So that, as God makes himself known in his act of self-revelation, our "knowing about God" can mature into simply "knowing God." In God's word we encounter the incarnate Word, Christ, and are drawn beyond understanding into life. "*Life, life, life,*" write Richard and Kathy. "It pulsates throughout the Bible, flowing from the living Word." In Scripture we find Christ, and in Christ we find eternal, abundant life. *That* is why we read.

Every blessing,

Christopher S Webb

Christopher S. Webb, TSSF

## GROWING TOGETHER

In Scripture we find Christ, and in Christ we find eternal abundant life. That is why we read.  
This exercise of *Lectio Divina* is a prayerful reading from the heart.

**Lectio Divina** (sacred reading) is an ancient Christian discipline which helps draw us into this formational approach to reading Scripture. The four movements of this practice are described below. Many people, when learning to read in this way, find it helpful to begin with the Psalms and Gospels, since they speak so clearly and directly of our relationship with Christ; you might find the following passages (for example) provide a good starting point:

• *Psalm 139 (God's intimate knowledge of us)* • *Matthew 8:23-27 (Jesus calms the storm)* • *Mark 2:1-12 (Jesus heals a paralyzed man)* • *Luke 19:1-10 (Jesus and Zaccheus)* • *John 20:11-18 (Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene)*

The *Lectio Divina* process: Now, take a moment to come fully into the present. Sit comfortably alert, close your eyes, and center yourself with breathing deeply.

Reading (*lectio*). We begin with the slow, prayerful, and attentive reading of the Bible. This is not the time for devouring great chunks of Scripture, nor for detailed scholarly study. Take some small passage; read, re-read, and read again. Be wholly present to the text, and alert to the voice of the Spirit speaking through it.

Reflecting (*meditatio*). At some point in our reading, some phrase, sentence, or idea might "catch" in our thoughts. Like a jeweler examining a diamond, we turn the phrase over and over in our hearts, letting one facet after another reveal itself, listening for the gentle voice of the Spirit. We pause and allow the words to settle in our spirits.

Responding (*oratio*). Our meditation on Scripture will often naturally develop into prayer. Perhaps as I reflect on God's grace revealed in some phrase, I begin to pray for that grace to be revealed in my life. Or, as I reflect on God's compassion, I begin to ask for that loving mercy to be shown to others in my life. Allowing the words to stir up prayer within us draws us from "informational reading" into "relational reading."

Resting (*contemplatio*). Finally, having been ushered into the Divine Presence, and having shared our hearts with him, we fall into easy silence, giving space for God to be present to us. He may have something more to share, to say; he may simply want the pleasure of our uninterrupted company. Without agenda, we put ourselves at God's disposal, making an offering of our time and love.

## LIFE WITH GOD

### AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN A. HELMERS LITERARY AGENT, EDITOR, AND WRITER

Following the publication of *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Helmers teamed up to produce a book to mine the central themes of *The Renovaré Bible*. Kathy began by meeting with all the Bible editors for a weekend to record their free-flowing discussion. Next, Richard and Kathy gathered regularly to discuss individual chapters. The process went something like this: there would be a lively discussion in Richard's home of concepts for an individual chapter with lots of give and take and interaction about the ideas and sometimes even the actual wording that would best express those ideas. Kathy would then take all these conversations and put them through her creative process and write the chapter. Then Richard and Kathy would gather again to go over what was written and work toward the next chapter. Of course, Mickey Maudlin, HarperOne's senior editor, was a third party to this process . . . at one point leading to an almost entire rewrite of the book! Below is an interview with Kathryn Helmers about this process for producing *Life with God*. — RJF

**Richard Foster:** I know that a collaborative effort can be both a blessing and a curse. What did you find most helpful in this writing process? What was especially difficult?

**Kathryn Helmers:** I count as chief among the blessings of this collaboration the colorful wildlife at your birdfeeder and birdbath, the gentle gurgling of your slate water fountain, and Carolyn's lunches out on the picnic table as the three of us basked in Colorado sunshine filtered through evergreen trees. If not for the deadlines, it would have been perfect!

Other than the logistics of getting the project done, my only difficulty with the collaboration was tackling the scope of what you and the editorial team of *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* had accomplished in order to distill its primary concepts into book form. A tall order! I hope this book will prompt readers to dive back into the Scripture with moments where they think, "Oh, THAT is what they meant about entering the strange new world of the Bible."

For me, the lasting value of collaboration has been what I learned about writing and about God. I learned yet again that writing is a truly humbling process: I am in service to the life of the book. The book is not in service to my ego as an artist wannabe . . . to my religious agenda as a person on a spiritual path tempted to take cheap shots at

the lesser-enlightened (this does not mean you, Mom) . . . or to my particular understanding of what the Bible does or does not teach. And then you and I had to submit our individualized way of writing to a collective vision for the book. Ultimately, I hope, we were in service to whatever God's plans are for the life of this book among its readers.

As for what I learned about God through the collaboration process? I can sum it up simply: grace is even more important than I thought. Grace that I do not have as much power as I thought to do things well, or to screw them up. Grace in moments of gratitude that any of us is given work to do that matters, and that sometimes it matters because we are doing it together instead of alone. And grace in God's remarkable decision to mix it up with human beings for life on earth and for all eternity. I mean, really, if you or I were God why would we want to go and mess up the wonder-filled fellowship of the Trinity for that?

**RF:** You are so right, Kathy—it truly is "amazing grace." On a little different tack, what would you say is the key message of *Life with God*? Is there any special "take-home" value?

**KH:** I have two ways of answering this question. First, I would hope there is enough variety of content for readers to discover any one of a number of key benefits according to their interests and needs. For example, perhaps those burdened by rigid agendas superimposed upon the Scripture will find relief simply in reading the Bible afresh as the story of life with God. I would be delighted if that turned out to be a primary benefit for some readers who have been overexposed to certain kinds of Bible education.

Second, for me personally, the big "aha" of this book is reversing my (mis)understanding of how life with God actually happens. I used to think of religious practice

**Kathryn A. Helmers** has been a literary agent for 12 years with a primary focus on Christian spirituality for the general market. Kathy lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with her dog Buckie.

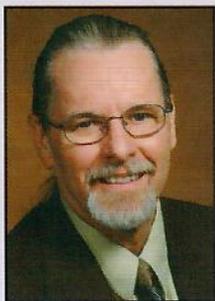


as the key to making life with God possible, as if God were offering to meet me halfway while I gained ground in moving closer to God by doing my part. Inevitably, when I did not hold up my end, I would envision God standing at a distance from me with arms crossed, foot-tapping impatiently while muttering, “uh hmm—just as I suspected, Helmers.” Now, I visualize life with God as something blessedly independent of my ability to make anything happen, or not. There is a life already going on, into which I am invited and for which everything I need is being supplied. I do not have to work my way into it—instead, I have only to seek immersion in it. It flows before me and after me. And it will flow through me, if I can get out of the way to let it swirl and intermingle with its flow through other lives, joining all of us in the great river of what God’s Spirit is doing through human beings. For a hand-wringing, self-preoccupied spiritual neurotic like me, this is very good news.

**RF:** I know you worked hard to express my “voice” in the writing . . . and I think you did an excellent job at doing so. I also imagine doing this would be especially difficult. Can you describe that process a little?

**KH:** Richard, I often wondered why you would ever let yourself get roped into something like this. And yes, I can describe the process in three words: “Lord have mercy!” The effort to find a voice that would express yours while inevitably modulating it through the introduction of a second writer was challenging yet rewarding.

I found myself constantly trying to refocus my vision until I saw with your eyesight rather than my own. Remember my first draft (of the second rewrite) of chapter three, on experiencing the with-God life? I was all over the place trying to find a hermeneutics of Christology for some grand and glorious vision of—drum roll please—the Immanuel Principle, ta da! Cue the heavenly chorus. I knew it was not working, but I did not know why and for love or money I could not see a way out of the mess I had gotten myself into. But you saw a way, and you began to lead us into the center of the Bible’s message by charting our way through its varying peoples and events, repeatedly intoning God’s word to us, “I am with you—will you be with me?” Your simple (but not simplistic) repetition of that phrase became like a bell tolling in my mind, silencing all else as I sank back into my chair in relief,



**Richard J. Foster** is the founder of RENOVARÉ and author of six books including *Celebration of Discipline*, *PRAYER: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, and *Streams of Living Water*, and was the lead General Editor for *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*.

typing out notes for a new approach.

I learned a lot from you in regard to simplicity of thought and speech. When I struggle with expression, sometimes it is less from craft issues than from the need to identify precisely what it is I really want to say. Time and again you moved us toward simple clarity of thought. This influence, in turn, tempered my stylistic gluttony for florid embellishment. As you patiently guided us toward the elegance of simple expression, I realized that simplicity of speech is the writer’s equivalent of practicing the spiritual discipline of mercy with readers.

**RF:** At one point when we were about two-thirds of the way through the manuscript *Mickey*, as the editor, called a halt to everything we had done, feeling that the approach was not quite right. That forced us to re-evaluate and literally start over. Can you share some of your feelings during that process?

**KH:** Only my faithful canine companion, Buckie—a writer’s service dog if ever there was one—knows my true feelings during that process, so I will leave them for his floppy ears only. But I will share with you my thoughts. Of course the news was disappointing, in part because I am usually the one giving such bad news of extensive homework, not receiving it! Mickey’s editorial instincts were right on target, however. He insisted that we invert our focus from how the Bible tells the story of life with God to how life with God happens because of the story the Bible tells. It may sound like a subtle nuance, but as you know it had enormous implications. For example, we dealt more extensively with the Spiritual Disciplines as a means, not an end, for life with God. They are powerless to transform us, yet they enable us to seek transformation proactively. The real power is always grace and nothing but.

**RF:** Yes, indeed! Kathy, I am just wondering if there is anything you would like to say in this interview that you were reluctant to say to my face while we were working together?

**KH:** Well, uh, why no, Richard. Except that I am extraordinarily grateful for the chance to have spent time and energy with you in the goal of helping readers understand that something really, really good is waiting for them—in the next moment of their lives, in the next year, in the life to come, right now—if they put everything down for a little while and ask God to sweep them up into the life that Jesus is always opening to us. Thank you for this opportunity to say to God, “yes, I want to live with You, not without You” in such a unique way.

**RF:** Thank you for sharing with us. It has been a genuine joy collaborating with you on this project. Kathy, your hard work and genuine creativity has, I believe, produced in *Life with God* a resource that can help every person who seeks to come to the Bible with a deep heart-longing for spiritual transformation.

AN EXCERPT  
FROM  
LIFE WITH GOD

### Entering the World of the Bible

When we sit down with the Bible and open its pages, seeking to draw near to God, what kind of inner attitude is most helpful for ushering us into the refreshing spiritual waters for which we thirst? This is not a matter of the mechanics of Bible study, or whether to start with Genesis, or the Gospel of John, or daily readings coupling excerpts from the Psalms and Proverbs. No, it is much more a matter of how to tune mind, heart, and soul for reading the Bible as spiritual practice, so that we might grow in the supernatural love of God.

Reading the Bible for interior transformation is a far different endeavor than reading the Bible for historical knowledge, literary appreciation, or religious instruction. In the latter case we learn head knowledge; in the former, heart knowledge. To allow the Bible to infiltrate us with the Life God offers—piercing us like a two-edged sword dividing “soul from spirit, joints from marrow . . . [judging] the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12)—we must bring to the Bible our whole selves, expectantly, attentively, and humbly. . . .

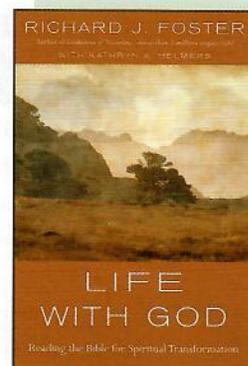
We can bring heart, mind, and soul to the Bible by expecting God to meet us there. This does not mean, of course, that God will always meet us in the same way or to the same degree of intensity each time we read or study the Bible. It does mean that we can always expect the living Word to meet us through the written words of the Bible. . . .

Reading the Bible for spiritual transformation is tantamount to inviting a Damascus road experience. If we venture onto the ancient roads of the Bible’s world with an open mind and an inquiring heart, we can expect to encounter the living God. All we need do is ask Saul’s question: “Who are you, Lord?” Scripture is filled with the promise of the Lord’s reply. . . .

### Enter Humbly

The Bible is the means through which we are introduced to Jesus and invited to follow him in a life of humility and service. Secured by the knowledge that in Christ our origin is God and our destination is God, we will yield the fruit of service to others. This is the “so what” of our Bible reading. Does it shape our spirits in love and humility? Does it lead us more fully into life with God?

When we come to the Bible expectantly, attentively, and humbly, we will experience the joy of losing ourselves in the great river of Life that is life, indeed. That is what the Bible is all about: human life eternally bound up in the divine Life. Even now God is writing us into the beautiful culmination of this grand story: human beings as the dwelling place of God who is fully present with them. This is the dynamic of the great *Immanuel Principle*—the “God with us” way of life.



Excerpted from *Life with God* by Richard J. Foster with Kathryn A. Helmers (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), pp. 21-24, 32, 35. Reprinted by permission.

Over \$12,000 has been given to RENOVARÉ in response to the \$20,000 Summer 2008 Matching Fund appeal.

Thank you for your encouragement and affirmation as RENOVARÉ’s ministry and leadership transition continues. And please do consider contributing to RENOVARÉ on a monthly basis. Visit [www.renovare.org/rd.htm](http://www.renovare.org/rd.htm) for details.

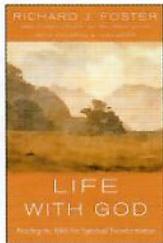
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### A VIEW OF SCRIPTURE FOR LIFELONG DISCIPLESHIP

“There is a desperate need today for a richer, fuller understanding of the relevance of Scripture for daily living,” writes Richard J. Foster in *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, so that we might be drawn “irresistibly into the biblical drama of love and terror and pity and pain and wonder, until the biblical witness becomes all over autobiographic of us.” To this end, RENOVARÉ has developed a number of resources that address the spiritual formation view of Scripture that we so badly need for intentional, lifelong discipleship.



#### LIFE WITH GOD

##### Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation

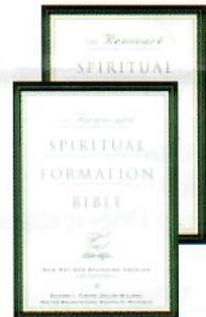
by Richard J. Foster  
with Kathryn A. Helmers

Approaching the Bible that God might use it to transform us, rather than insisting that it cater to our own needs and perspectives—this is exactly the idea behind *Life with God*. Written with Kathryn A. Helmers, Richard J. Foster claims that God has so superintended the writing of Scripture that it serves as the most reliable guide for Christian spiritual formation. The Bible is all about human life “with God.” So as we read Scripture, we should consider how exactly God is with us in each story—and allow ourselves to be spiritually transformed. By opening our whole selves—mind, body, spirit; thoughts, behavior, will—to the open page before us, we begin to grasp all the Bible has to teach about prayer, obedience, compassion, virtue, and grace—and apply it to our everyday lives to achieve a deeper relationship with God. HarperOne, hardcover, 240 pages.

### THE RENOVARÉ SPIRITUAL FORMATION BIBLE

**General Editors:** Gayle Beebe, Richard J. Foster, Lynda L. Graybeal, Thomas C. Oden & Dallas Willard  
**Contributing Editors:** Walter Brueggemann, Eugene Peterson & Brenda Quinn

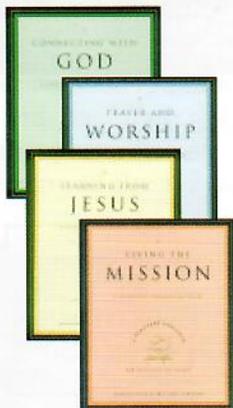
*The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* integrates the spiritual disciplines into the Christian life by showing how they are central to the Bible’s teachings and stories. This unique Bible illuminates issues of spiritual formation throughout the Scriptures, providing a unique window into how we can become more intimate with God. More substantial than a devotional Bible, yet deeper than a study Bible, the *Renovaré Bible* is poised to redefine what the Bible can mean for Christian discipleship. With many unique features, maps, and a concordance, and using the New Revised Standard Version translation, it is available with and without the Intertestamental books. HarperBibles, hardcover.



### RENOVARÉ SPIRITUAL FORMATION GUIDES

by Lynda L. Graybeal & Julia L. Roller • Introduction by Richard J. Foster

With inspiration from the With-God Life expressions in *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, the *RENOVARÉ Spiritual Formation Guides* bridge traditional Bible study, reading of devotional classics, spiritual formation group accountability and practices, and larger intentional discipleship themes. Each chapter includes a devotional reading, a “My Life With God” practice, a Scripture selection, spiritual formation teaching points, an historic Christian exemplar, and additional ideas for reflection and growth. Addressing spiritual formation and Scripture themes and serving as introductions to the RENOVARÉ outlook on lifelong discipleship, the *Guides* are formatted similarly to *A Spiritual Formation Workbook*, being accessible to individuals and small groups. HarperOne, softcover.



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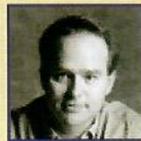
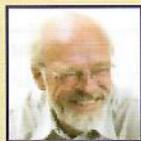
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