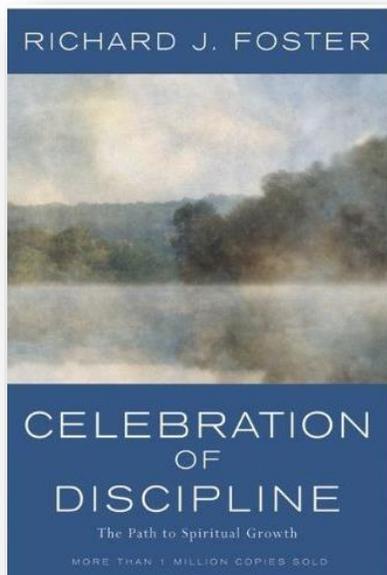


Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

January 23, 2018

The first time I remember seeing Richard Foster in person was at some point in my thirties. We were both much younger (duh!), and he had recently burst upon the scene of Christian authors with his book, *Celebration of Discipline* (1978). I was at a conference somewhere at which Richard was a featured speaker, and he sat at the table next to mine at breakfast one morning.

That, tiny as it is, represents the entirety of my “personal” relationship with Richard Foster; but I have heard him speak on many occasions since, and I have read many of his books, some of them more than once.



Celebration of Discipline examines the “inward disciplines” of **prayer, fasting, meditation, and study**, the “outward disciplines” of **simplicity, solitude, submission, and service**, and the “corporate disciplines” of **confession, worship, guidance, and celebration**. It has sold over a million copies, and was named by *Christianity Today* as one of the “top ten Christian books of the twentieth century.”

That book put Richard, a Quaker professor and theologian, “on the map,” but it was not his last book, by a long shot. Richard Foster is one of the people about whom I’m willing to say that anything with his name on it is worth reading.

One of my favorites is *Streams of Living Water*.

In studying the history of the Church, Richard noticed that there seem to be six primary “dimensions,” or “approaches” to the Christian life, and that different part of the larger Church tend to gravitate to one of these “streams” that seems most congenial. Richard’s argument is that a balanced Christian life really must involve attention to each of these streams, and in this book, he offers a substantial introduction to each of them.

The book itself is well worth your time; but here’s a brief introduction from Richard’s *Renovaré* (“renewal”) website:¹

Prayer-Filled Life: Our heart’s steady attention on God

The Contemplative Tradition continually draws us into love for God, reminding us that the Christian life is less like a rule book and more like falling in love. It stresses the value of silence, solitude, and prayer as ways we engage with God’s presence, whether we take a silent walk in the early morning, ride the bus to work, wash dishes while the kids nap, or even take a nap ourselves. As Teresa of Avila described, contemplation is “an intimate sharing between friends,” in the time or manner that works best for you and God.

¹ <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/the-six-streams>

Virtuous Life: Responding with integrity

The Holiness Tradition emphasizes the re-formation of our hearts so that we are able to respond appropriately to the challenges of life. The word “holiness” has some negative connotations today, but the original Greek meaning of the word virtue is simply “to function well.” Virtuous Life is not about rules or judgement, perfectionism, or some kind of merit gained by good deeds. It encourages us to the ultimate goal: not to “get us into heaven, but to get heaven into us.” It is attentiveness to the source of our actions, to the condition and motives of the heart, and taking on new patterns of life that flow naturally from within.

We see Jesus consistently doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done. We see in him such deeply ingrained “holy habits” that he is always “reponse-able,” always able to respond appropriately. This is purity of heart. This is the virtuous life.

Spirit-Empowered Life: Fueling our lives from the presence and power of God

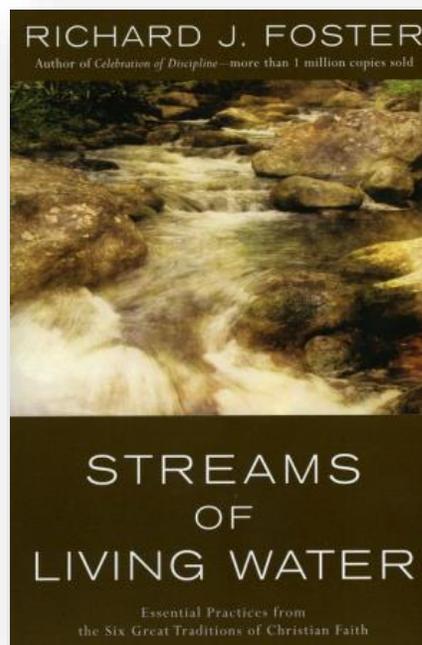
The Charismatic Tradition focuses on the power of God’s Spirit moving in and through us. Just as a car requires fuel to run, and our bodies require food for survival, so our souls rely upon the Spirit of God for spiritual energy. Through the Spirit, we are able to do more than we could on our own steam, and these abilities not only remind us of God’s presence, but equip us to build up our communities in love. Frankly, there are no “non-charismatic Christians.” The Christian life is by definition a life in and through the Spirit.

Compassionate Life: Extending compassion in every sphere of life

The Social Justice Tradition expresses the themes of justice, compassion, and peace. It emphasizes wisdom and lovingkindness to bring relationships into harmony, unity, and balance, even within our relationship to nature. Compassionate Life takes place in all arenas of life, from personal to social to global. As with the other traditions, the actions we take are not the end goal. True compassion is motivated by a genuine heart, is empowered by the love of God, and embraces the possibility of positive change. Love of God makes love of neighbor possible.

Word-Centered Life: Living the life-giving message

The Evangelical Tradition encompasses much more than simply converting people. The evangel – the “good news” – is God’s great message to humanity: that all can be redeemed and restored to its intended design. This is the message embodied in Jesus himself, rooted in the word of God, and ultimately expressed through the lives of those who follow Christ. It is a living tale of grace spoken in and through word and action. This faith stream addresses the crying need for people to see the good news lived and hear the good news proclaimed.



Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world

The Incarnational Tradition focuses on the relationship between the invisible spirit and physical reality, helping us to see God's divine presence in the material world in which we live. God manifests himself in his creation, even in the midst of mundane activities, whenever and wherever we acknowledge God.

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Some years ago, Richard's *Renovaré* team put together a *Spiritual Formation Workbook* that small groups can use to facilitate an experiential introduction to these six streams of Christian experience. The workbook is now in its third edition. I've been in small groups that used the first two editions, and our Deacons have selected the third edition as the focus for this year's all-church Lenten Study.

The study runs for seven weeks, with an optional eighth week. It begins with an overview session, then spends one week with each of the six streams. In between sessions, you'll be encouraged to experiment with spiritual exercises and disciplines that will give you a feel for that week's emphasis, and by the end of the study, you'll not only have some new and deeper friendships with the CBFers in your group, but a deeper friendship with God as well.

Small groups will be offered at various locations and throughout the week, beginning the week of February 4. Workbooks (\$10) and signup sheets are available after each service. Your Deacons and I hope that you will choose to be a part of this Adventure in the Lord. Jump in!

Dave

