

# Growing God's People

a journal for teachers and other learners

## Working as the Carpenter's Assistant

When God made the purchase we were the old house with the rotten foundation, surrounded by decay and trash and destined for condemnation and destruction. He alone saw the restored building through a vision driven by love, and He gave of Himself to bring our redemption.

But the analogy of the house can stop there. Moving along into the process of *sanctification*, we become the Carpenter's assistant. We see His blueprints on the table, we marvel at the tools He so deftly handles, and we grow increasingly comfortable trusting that the tasks to which He has assigned us are tasks for which we have been adequately equipped.

Our transformation is completely dependent upon the

Carpenter, inasmuch as we are recipients of His leadership, counsel, instruction, repair and correction, and ultimate strengthening. On the other hand, the Carpenter is *fact*—a guaranteed presence, an unquestionable source of life and wisdom, and the *Guarantor* of the work itself; thus, it can be said that the work becomes dependent upon us. The work of sanctification pivots on *our* obedience and on *our* capacity to work effectively with the Carpenter and the Holy Spirit whom He sends.

This issue of *GGP* focuses on three ways in which we can invite the Holy Spirit to carry out the renovation that we desire. Later we profile a book focused on renovation, and then switch gears and give you food for thought in the exegetical exercise.

## Inviting the Holy Spirit Home

### In this issue.. page #

Discipline of grace: 1-2

*Inviting the Holy Spirit*

Theology of Teaching 2

*To Know God's Blessings*

Poetry 3

*Blessedness*

Book Review: 3

*Renovation of the Heart*

Biblical Studies 4

*Matthew 23:8-12*

*When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace.*

**By Robert Hodge**

As we practice the disciplines of grace and embrace the communal and private practices of our faith, our goal should be the renovation of our heart. Under such reconstruction, our heart becomes increasingly formed into the image of Christ.

This is ultimately and supremely the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures tell us that He works in certain ways. And by going to the Bible we are brought into a context that God has prepared as a guided tour for hearts that journey toward Heaven, including prayer, singing, and solitude.

### PRAYER

The Holy Spirit inhabits our prayers. When Christ promised to send the Spirit, the disciples learned that there would be One who would accompany them as Jesus had and who would speak to and through them to accomplish His will. When we pray, it is the Spirit of God who translates our words into a divine language and enfolds our heart, soul, mind, and

strength into the divine economy to accomplish both in us and in our world the very will of the eternal God.

A life of prayer must bring about transformation because it is a life lived in the presence of God. Like a plant with deep roots to wells of living water and verdant leaves enriched by a tropical sun, so are our lives when we insist upon the goodness that God provides us if we would fellowship with Him in prayer.

### SINGING

The Holy Spirit inhabits our singing, causing our words to be those that are most pleasing to God and taking captive our energy (so often spent on lusts and anxieties) moves our focus heavenward.

A culture is captured in its poetry, and the songs of our Christian heritage—both ancient and new—place upon our lips the truths refined through martyr's fire and countless hours of saints in prayer.

We have all known the power of Christ-centered music and been overwhelmed with tears or reduced to a prostrate stance before the Almighty fully aware that we are in the presence of a holy God and uttering words that tell us we are before His throne, and for that moment no place else in the universe. ↪



*Inviting the Holy Spirit, continued.*

**SOLITUDE**

The Holy Spirit abides with us in our times of solitude. Yet we resist being alone, fearing for our mental survival and running from the revelations that might be known if only we had no one to listen to but God and/or our own spirit.

I've heard it said that you don't play tennis to get in shape, but get in shape to play tennis. Solitude brings the fitness and conditioning to our spirits in order that we might then more effectively embrace other disciplines like fasting, prayer, and meditation.

As humans we have a tremendous capacity for self-deception. We can eat more than we need, all the while "convincing ourselves" (often at a willful but subconscious level) that we need it. Or we pursue happiness through mass consumption of material goods even though we "know" full well that *things* don't bring

deep satisfaction nor give back what we give to gain them. But we don't stop and the insanity goes on. Solitude isolates us from these lusts and allows the Spirit to intervene.

In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard writes that "solitude is the most radical of the disciplines for life in the spirit. In penal institutions, solitary confinement is used to break the strongest of wills. It is capable of this because it excludes interactions with others upon which fallen human personality completely depends...It is solitude and solitude alone that opens the possibility of a radical relationship to God that can withstand all external events up to and beyond death."

May we be increasingly a People set apart from this world and shaped into the image of our savior, Jesus Christ.



**Teaching and Learning God's Way**

**To Know God's Blessings**

*By T.M. Moore*

God holds out incredible promises of blessings for people. Jesus came that we might have life, and "have it abundantly" (Jn. 10.10)—a life of undiminished hope, deep-seated joy, lasting peace, daily provision, real purpose and meaning, and life everlasting with God. Several times the psalmists are given to wonder

and marveling over the abundant grace of God in offering such blessings to puny creatures such as we (cf. Pss. 8, 144).

Yet these promises and blessings are only available to those who enter into them by faith; and, since faith is the "evidence" of our hope in such unseen things as the Lord holds out to us (Heb. 11.1), it necessarily entails some action on our parts, to secure the proffered blessings. As when God, having rescued His servant Jacob from his brother, Esau, led him back to Bethel, to the place where He had first made Himself known to Jacob, and called him to take up the promises of God with renewed vigor and vision (Gen. 35.9-15).

Jacob had finagled the promises of Abraham away from his brother early on; now God assured him those promises were his, indeed (v. 12). In language invoking His original covenant with Adam, God called Jacob to faithfulness in the divine program of being fruitful and multiplying, subduing and ordering the land and everything and everyone in it, and promised a race of kings as his descendants.

In the Old Testament the land, while a very real place, serves as a symbol of all the promised blessings of God. It is there, in the land flowing with milk and honey, that God

encouraged His people to seek His goodness to the full. In that respect, the land prefigures the coming of the Holy Spirit, who brings the fullness of life in Christ to those who believe. For Israel in the Old Testament, to realize the fullness of God's promises they had to *occupy* the land and *subdue* it by defeating the enemies of God and cultivating all the potential of Canaan. In His encounter with Jacob at Bethel, God reminds the patriarch that the blessings of grace come through obedience to the divine program.

So too the blessings of life in God's Spirit: if we would know full and abundant life in Christ we must "occupy" the "land" of the Spirit, putting to death the enemies of God (cf. Rom. 6), denying the sinful tendencies of the flesh (Gal. 5.16-23), and sowing to the Spirit in all we think, say, and do (Gal. 6.7-10). We must labor to be fruitful in the fruit of the Spirit, and to multiply in the work of making disciples if we would know the full blessings of God—if we would "have life and have it abundantly," as Jesus promised.

But where to begin? In worship and praise! At the end of his encounter with God, to show that he accepted God's proffered blessings and was devoting himself to the pursuit of them, Jacob set up an altar and worshiped the Lord. Worship is a crucial component of all learning. Do we believe the promises of God? Do we long to know more of the full and abundant life in God's Spirit? Then let us show that we have learned obedience to God through daily worship, singing to and praising the Lord in all we do, all day long. Each day can be an encounter with God at Bethel, where we are reminded of His grace and promised blessings, and where we devote ourselves anew to attaining these, seeking the fullness of the Spirit in a walk of worshipful obedience with the Lord. The way to the "land" of God's blessings is along the path of daily worship, where we begin each day and are sustained throughout it by praise, thanks, singing, and wonder before the Lord.



## *Blessedness*

*Psalm 27:4*

On a level with St. Patrick, St. Brigid provided spiritual leadership in Ireland during a period of gathering revival and served as Abbess of the monastery at Kildare. She died in the year 525.

*"...she practiced on earth the life of heaven, as was her custom, by contemplative meditation, and prayed to God."*

*-Cogitosus on Brigid*

In what sense *practiced*? As, *rehearsed*, perhaps?  
As if to claim of the eternal state  
that only such activity awaits  
us there? For some the prospect might a lapse  
of faith induce. For surely, they insist,  
eternal life is more than this? What of  
the many pleasures I have come to love?  
Should not eternal blessedness consist,  
at least in part, of some of these? How will,  
if contemplation of the Savior's face  
is all that's waiting for me in that place,  
I find of lasting happiness my fill?  
If not in this at present, never then;  
if ever here, there ever more again.

-Anonymous

## Featured Book

**TITLE:** *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*

**AUTHOR:** Dallas Willard



### *Reviewed by T.M. Moore*

Dallas Willard is at it again, whittling away at our comfort and summoning our souls to accountability in the latest of his series of books on the spiritual life.

In previous books, such as *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, *Hearing God*, and *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard established the primacy of the spiritual life and the calling of God to a conversational relationship with the Deity Himself in a Kingdom that is turning everything upside down for Jesus Christ. Those books are exciting and challenging reading. But they don't meddle nearly as much as *Renovation of the Heart*. Maybe that's why I like this book so much.

Willard's burden can be simply put: He offers an analysis of the soul, and an explanation of the process of spiritual transformation; then he guides us step by step through the disciplines involved in learning to love God and others, heart, mind, soul, and strength. While he insists, as do others, such as Larry Crabb and Ken Boa, that transformation begins within, in the heart, he does not stop there. Willard shows that spiritual transformation should lead to physical transformation, the dramatic alteration of the ways we use our bodies as followers of the Lord. Ultimately, this is a work of the Holy Spirit. But

we have a role to play, and it is our responsibility to understand the nature and demands of spiritual transformation and to devote ourselves to it as our primary calling in life.

The surgical power of this book is in the details, where Willard shows us what real "knowledge" consists of; how to bring our hearts into greater conformity with God's plan; why it's important to develop sound Biblical vision; how spiritual disciplines can result in changed bodily habits; and much more. I don't quite agree with his anatomy of the person, in which heart and mind are somehow separate from the soul, but in the main, this is an important book.

The teaching group staff of Cedar Springs Church is now studying this book together throughout the spring (right after Jonathan Edwards has finished prepping us for surgery with the three sermons in *Growing in God's Spirit*), and our times of discussing the book have been richly rewarding.

Dallas Willard won't necessarily make you feel warm and fuzzy; more likely you'll read this book with a combination of anticipation and, perhaps, fear. But read it anyway. *Renovation of the Heart* is one of the most important books of the past year. Don't miss it! ❖

# Preparing to Teach

## *Biblical Interpretation*

### Matthew 23:8-12

*But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*



#### WORD STUDY

How are these words translated in the various English translations you have in your home? What can be discerned about the title from the context in which it is used?

##### **rabbi**

John 1:49

John 3:2

Mark 9:5

##### **instructor**

Matthew 23:8

Matthew 23:10

1

#### Choosing Humility

*Who are some examples from Scripture of those who exalted themselves and were then humbled? Who are examples of those who humbles themselves and were then exalted?*



2

#### Scribes and Pharisees

*Consult a Bible dictionary or a book like IVP's Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels to find out what the teachers of Jesus' time thought about themselves.*

*How is this kind of thinking destructive within the church?*



3

#### What am I?

*We're looking for new terms to describe our service in the church as teachers, instructors, counselors, pastors, etc.*

*How might we describe ourselves in ways that don't cling to authority, but instead point to the ultimate authority of our one Teacher, the Christ?*



4



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation