

Reflections, January 2019

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Welcome to the first of what I hope will be a monthly column through 2019.

Recently I re-read Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" for the first time in nearly 40 years; finding his discussion of the twelve spiritual disciplines (there may be more) to be as fresh and vital as when I first read it during my student days.

Foster classifies the disciplines under three headings: inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, study); outward (simplicity, solitude, submission, service); and corporate (confession, worship, guidance, celebration). He devotes a chapter to each discipline, and the book lends itself as a personal devotional guide as well as for group study.

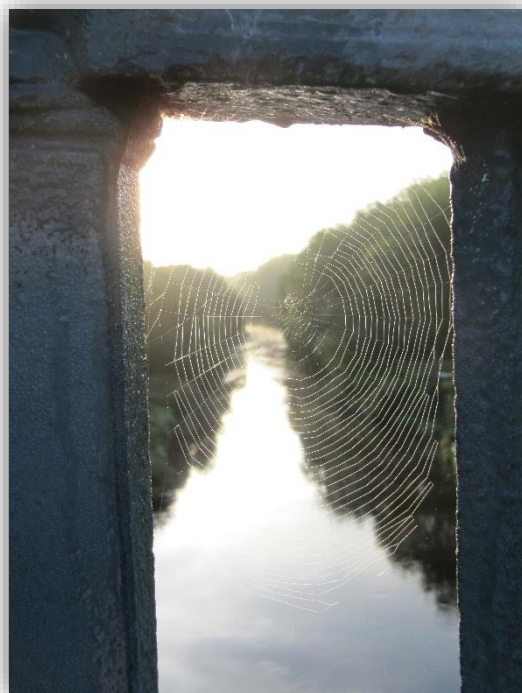
Perhaps we'll come back to CoD later in the year; at this stage let's talk briefly about the discipline of **worship**:

To worship is to experience reality... to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God.

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline¹

Shekinah is a Hebrew word that denotes the immediate presence of God, rather than something that is abstract or aloof.

Worship is our response to God who is always reaching out—through others, through the circumstances of our daily lives, through the Scriptures. God is making, as Foster expresses it, "overtures of love"² towards us. It's also meant to be our priority; after worship comes service and activity, not the other way around.



I don't know about you, but I have this tendency to get enmeshed in stuff (matters to do with home, family, work, Presbytery, whatever), offering God and others my expertise, trying to make things work the way that I think they should; then being reminded (yet again) that God is sovereign, requiring worship and obedience, not my advice on how to fix things or people.

Stilling ourselves before God in worship is the necessary precursor to everything else, an antidote to our tendency to get ahead of God (and others) and impose our solutions on the world's problems. We do well to remember this:

¹ Richard Foster, "Celebration of Discipline" (Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), page 138.

² Ibid, page 138.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8,9 (NIV)

As we begin another year of our journey together as God’s people, let’s ask God for the grace to rediscover the centrality of worship, the desire to still ourselves in worship, and in doing so, that the Holy Spirit renews our hearts and minds, making us more like the one whom we seek to serve.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Colossians 3:16-17

Questions for reflection

- What can I do to cultivate a worshipful attitude throughout each day, not just during those times of personal withdrawal and prayer, or when I come together with others?
- What things help me draw near to God in worship? What things hinder me from doing so? What then might I do about those things?