

---

## The Deep Center

---

By Richard J. Foster

---

I still remember my first encounter with Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion* many years ago. It was a cold, rainy February morning, and I had just slumped into a chair at Dulles International Airport to await my flight. Exhausted from a hectic schedule of "muchness" and "many-ness," I was glad for the solitude of

---

**A Testament of Devotion,  
by Thomas R. Kelly  
(HarperSan Francisco,  
\$11 paper)**

---

## Appetizer

### Presence, Peace, Power

For the experience of Presence is the experience of peace, and the experience of peace is the experience not of inaction but of power, and the experience of power is the experience of a pursuing Love that loves its way untiringly to victory. He who knows the Presence knows peace, and he who knows peace knows power and walks in complete faith that that objective Power and Love which has overtaken him will overcome the world.

—from *A Testament of Devotion*

airport and airplane as I made my trek from D.C. to L.A.

I pulled out the slender volume I had brought along for reading during free moments. Immediately Thomas Kelly caught my attention by describing perfectly my condition and the condition of so many I knew: "We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow." Yes, I had to confess, I saw myself in those words. To all who knew me I was confident and in command, but inwardly I was tired and scattered.

Then my eyes came upon words of hope and promise: "We have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power. If only we could slip over into that Center!" Instinctively, I knew that he was speaking of a reality beyond my experience. Please understand me, I was not ungodly or irreverent—just the opposite. My problem was that I was so serious, so concerned to do what was right, that I felt compelled to respond to every call to service. After all, they were wonderful opportunities to minister in Christ's name. The end result, however, was what Kelly describes as "an intolerable scramble of panting feverishness."

Then came the sentence that was to prompt an inner revolution: "We have seen and known some people who seem to have found this deep Center of living, where the fretful calls of life are integrated, where No as well as

Yes can be said with confidence." I knew I had been found out. This ability to say Yes and No out of "the divine Center," as Kelly calls it, was foreign to me. Oh, I could say Yes easily enough because opportunities to serve carried an aura of spirituality and sacrifice. But to say No was another matter altogether. What would people think of me if I refused?

Even in that congested airport terminal I was utterly alone with the Alone. The cold rain splattering on the window was matched by the hot tears splattering on my jacket. The chair where I sat was a holy place, an altar. I was never to be the same. Quietly, I asked God to give me the ability to say No when it was right and good.

Back home, I was once again caught up in a flurry of activity. But I had made one decision: Friday nights were to be reserved for the family. It was a small decision at the time; nobody but I knew about it. I shared it with my wife, Carolynn, and the boys in a casual, offhand fashion; they did not know that it was a covenant commitment, a crossroads decision. Nor did I, really. It just seemed like the right thing to do—hardly what you would call a God-given directive.

But then the phone call came. It was a denominational executive. Would I be willing to speak to such-and-such a group next Friday night? There it was, another wonderful opportunity. Almost without thinking, I blurted out, "Oh no, I can't." The response was measured. "Oh, do you have another commitment?" I felt

trapped. (In those days I did not know that I could quite legitimately say that I did indeed have a very important commitment.) Cautiously but purposefully, I answered simply, "No," with no attempt to justify or explain my decision. There followed what seemed like an eternity of silence. I could almost feel the condemnation traveling through the telephone wires. I knew I had made a decision that made me seem less dedicated to someone for whom I genuinely cared. After a moment we shared a few pleasantries and then hung up.

But as the phone hit the receiver I jumped out of my chair shouting, "Hallelujah!" I had yielded to the Center, and the result was electrifying. That simple No coming out of divine promptings set me free from the tyranny of others. Even more, it set me free from my own inner clamoring for attention and recognition and applause.

This incident is so small and insignificant that it is almost embarrassing to relate it to you. I'm sure my denominational friend does not even recall the phone conversation. And yet I had turned a corner. Even now I sometimes wish that something terribly important precipitated such an inner transformation. But there it is, a trivial event, yet it changed everything for me. Perhaps it has been that way for you also. At least I know that often the genuinely significant issues are decided in the small corners of life. And one of the greatest gifts that Thomas Kelly brings to us is an ability to see the Holy in the most common of places and the most unexpected of events.

Since that first day in a Washington airport, I have returned often to *A Testament of Devotion*. Each time I leaf through its pages, pausing at well-marked passages, I know I am in the presence of a giant soul. I am the better for the encounter. I'm sure you will be too.

---

*Richard J. Foster is professor of spiritual formation at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California. Reprinted with permission by HarperSan Francisco from Foster's introduction to the 1992 edition of A Testament of Devotion. Kelly's book was first published in 1941.*