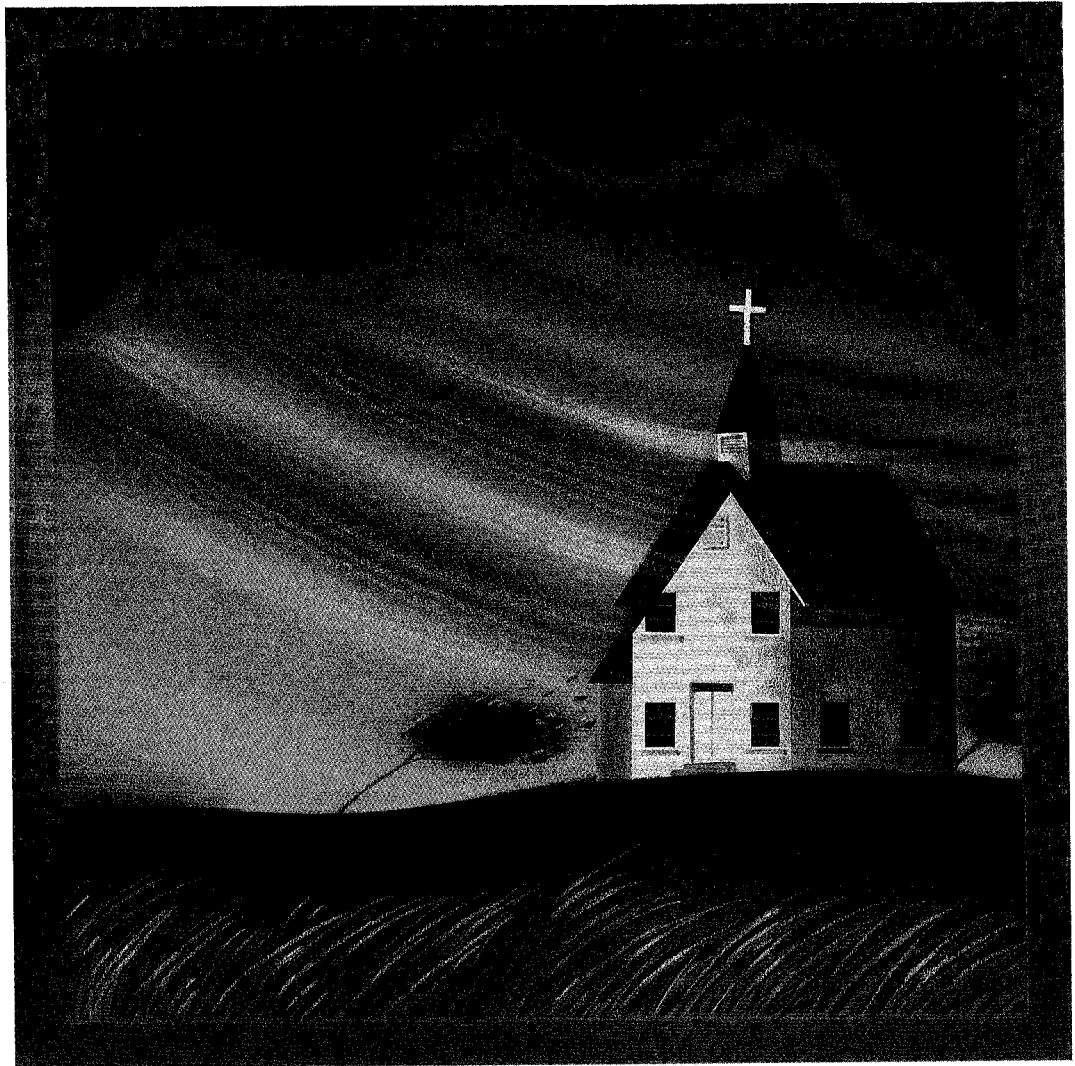


# Spiritual Challenges

*“The wind  
of holiness  
is coming  
to the  
church.”*



Paul Turnbaugh

By RICHARD J. FOSTER

**I** believe God will provide three major opportunities for spiritual growth in the 1990's that will, if we respond faithfully, reshape the American church by the end of this century.

The most important: God's work in the individual Christian.

This means conformity to the image of Christ,

abiding peace, a life penetrated by love, a faith that sees everything in light of God's overriding governance for good, a hope that stands firm in the most discouraging circumstances, and the power to do right and withstand the forces of evil.

We're told to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18), but for several decades the church hasn't helped us do that very well. We have a theology and a mechanism for spiritual *birth*, but little for spiritual *growth*.

This decade we'll have the opportunity to provide a practical theology and specific strategy for growing into Christlikeness. In other words, Christians will be taught how to live like Christians.

To accomplish all that, we need to concentrate on spiritual disciplines that bring about moral transformation. The old writers called them "holy habits"—cooperating with God for the inner personality's transformation so we can live a godly life.

I'm talking about something ordinary Christians can participate in all the time—prayer, fasting, silence, simplicity, solitude. Some are afraid of spiritual disciplines, thinking they smack of salvation by works. Instead, these are simple, practical means of growing in grace. If we expect to be like Jesus, we must do the kinds of things he did. There is no other way to follow Christ.

The only way to experience these holy habits is to practice them. Consider, for example, banding together in groups of three or four to lovingly nurture and encourage each other in the spiritual disciplines.

Two books that have helped me are *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard and *Addiction and Grace* by Gerald May (both Harper & Row).

### Body Life

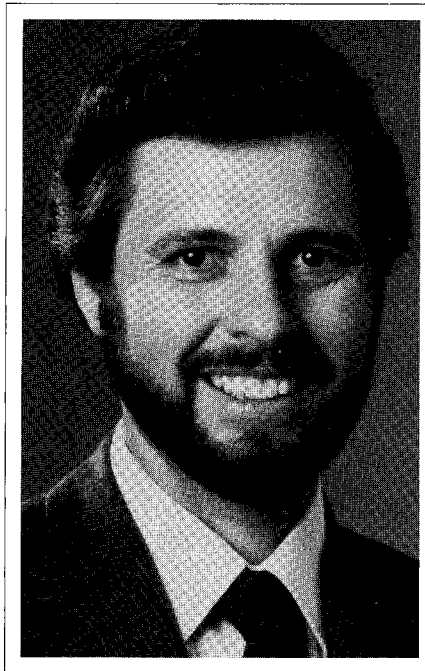
The second great opportunity is closely related: God's work in the church.

He will do that, I believe, by

showing us how to bring those disciplines into the life of the congregation in a way that will affect its schedule and programs.

If we believe spiritual growth is one of the main things the church is about, then people have to be taught to "observe all things which I commanded you" so they can follow Jesus.

Paul told Timothy to exercise himself to be godly (1 Tim 4:7-8). But most Christians try to be like Jesus without any training, and it will never work. If I tried to run a marathon without training, it'd be a disaster. But if I train, that's different.



Richard J. Foster

I'm not talking about adding things to an overcrowded church schedule, but integrating the life of prayer and other disciplines into the life of the church. Instead of having a fun-and-games singles ministry, for example, its function could be learning to pray and worship.

And I'm not talking about sitting around with your eyes closed. In-

stead, look at the people you're praying for, lay hands on them, bless them, laugh, have fun, sing, give reports on what God is doing, so we can rejoice.

### A Holy Wind

The third challenge is God's work upon the church: creating moral integrity among leadership.

God has said, "Enough," and is cleansing his church worldwide. He will no longer tolerate a private life of sin among leaders.

I believe this will continue for the next three years. The wind of God is blowing, and it's called "Holiness to God." What we've seen in the media is only a small part. Last year, 60 national and international leaders came under investigation or discipline by church boards. That's God working, not the devil.

The wind of holiness will come to the whole church, but will come first to the leaders. Immoral lives, greed, empire building, racism, sexism—none of this will be allowed. The leadership of the 1990's will be characterized by humility.

God doesn't seem to be nearly as embarrassed as we about this. He's exposing these things publicly. Some leaders will be discredited and will refuse to come under this holiness; others will repent and be restored.

But by the end of the decade, a renewed leadership will flourish. Much work remains, and God is doing it. That's his business; our task is to flow with what God is doing, come under his discipline and understand that it is, indeed, from God. ■