

LET GOD

The Transforming Wisdom of
François Fénelon

Winn Collier



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To Mom and Dad,
God graciously gave you to me as my
very first guides.
I love you.

Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction	
Fénelon's Voice to Guide Us	xi
First Conversation	1
Why Is God So Peculiar?	
To a Friend Facing God's Hard Mercy	5
To a Friend Finding Hope in Humility	6
To a Delightfully Impoverished Friend	8
To a Friend Under God's Knife	11
To a Friend Finding Happiness in Suffering	13
Second Conversation	15
How Do I Pursue Spiritual Maturity?	
To a Friend in Pain	19
To a Friend in Need of Perspective	22
To a Spiritually Exhausted Soul	24
To a Friend Afraid of Dying	26
To a Friend Surprised by God	29
To a Religious God-resister	32

Third Conversation	35
How Do I Hear God?	
To a Confused Listener	39
To a Friend Desiring to Know the Future	41
To a Friend Wondering What Prayer Is	43
To a Friend Wondering How to Pray	45
To a Friend in Need of Simplicity	47
Fourth Conversation	49
What Do I Do When I'm Broken Down?	
To a Spiritually Lethargic Friend	53
To a Friend Obsessed with His Faults	54
To a Friend Who Needs to Stop Trying So Hard	56
To a Friend Who Must Give Herself Kindness	59
To a Friend Who Must Make a Decision	60
To a Weak Christian	61
Fifth Conversation	63
How Do I Cultivate A Quiet Soul?	
To a Spiritually Overactive Friend	67
To a Friend Who Cannot Stop	70
To a Friend with a Runaway Mind	73
To an Emotional Wreck	75
Sixth Conversation	79
How Can I Live in Community?	
To a Lonely Friend	83
To a Wounded Soul	85
To a Friend Living with Difficult People	87
To a Judgmental Friend	89

Seventh Conversation	91
What Do I Do When Life Is Dark and Bleak?	
To a Grieving Heart	93
To a Friend Cornered by God	96
To a Deceived Sufferer	101
To a Friend Who Has Suffered Too Much	103
From One Distressed Friend to Another	105
To a Friend Who Must Die	108
To an Inevitable Sufferer	109
Eighth Conversation	111
What Do I Need to Change?	
To a Friend Addicted to Spiritual Ambition	115
To a Friend Who Flinches at Correction	118
To a Poisoned Soul	121
To a Friend Overly Enamored with the Mind	122
To a Friend with a Shut-down Heart	125
Guiding and Being Guided: A Short Biography	127
Acknowledgments	131
Notes	133

Preface

Preface

My days spent with Fénelon on this project have been both pleasurable and unnerving. The time has been pleasurable because I have enjoyed hours with a man who is wise and kind and who has just the right type of authority (strong, yet never harsh). It has been unnerving because, as I've worked, I've had this nagging question of whether or not Fénelon would like the way I've modernized his message. The funny thing is that I think Fénelon would be more concerned by the self-obsession of the question than by any of the blunders of the text (and no doubt there are blunders). "Let it go. Trust," I hear Fénelon saying. "It's not up to you to get it right."

So, I will try.

Fénelon's original French work has been well-preserved, but not all of it has been translated into English. This book is comprised primarily from a collection of Fénelon's correspondence translated into English by M.W. Dodd in 1853 entitled *Spiritual Letters*.¹

I have put these letters together thematically, taking into account some of the obvious questions and issues Fénelon responded to with his friends. We have little record of the letters precipitating Fénelon's replies. We don't know the names of those to whom he wrote. However, recently I was in a university library and found Fénelon's multivolume French

collection among the musty lower-level stacks. I opened it to find pictures of actual letters, with Fénelon's elegant scrawl. Something about seeing pen strokes instead of crisp, typed letters made it all more real. These were real people writing one another, sharing hope and disappointment, sin and joy.²

My work is a paraphrase, not a translation. I want Fénelon's voice to be heard in a fresh way. I hope to allow Fénelon's words to breathe again, in a new time and place. But I hope I have not meddled with Fénelon's essence. Part of Fénelon's appeal for me is that he is a voice with authority, a voice that can be trusted to tell me the truth, even if the truth is hard.

While Fénelon's wisdom is timeless, his syntax and idiom and metaphor are not. What's more, Fénelon wrote letters, not treatises. His sentences helped foster a relationship to enjoy, not just a theological principle to follow. I believe it honors Fénelon and Fénelon's way to nudge these old words back to where they began, to a place of warm, plainspoken friendship.

This is why even the word *paraphrase* falls a bit flat. I've thought of this work more as a conversation. I have listened to Fénelon and then seen what his words and wisdom have evoked in me, where they have pricked and challenged, where they have unleashed hope and life. I hope you will be able to have this same sort of experience. The original context of these words was in conversation, so I think Fénelon would be pleased for us to enjoy the same relational dialogue. Fénelon loved to chat. Let him chat with you on these pages.

Introduction

Fénelon's Voice to Guide Us

Miska handed me back the ring. It was the hardest thing I'd ever done, reaching out and taking it back. But I didn't think I had a choice. Just a few days earlier, I'd asked Miska to marry me. We were on top of a mountain in the Rockies, and the stars were out. It was gorgeous, just the way I'd planned, the *last* thing that went as planned. Miska said yes. We kissed. And then something snapped in my head. Fear landed on me like a baby grand piano tossed onto my head from a few stories up. I descended into a gloom I couldn't pull out of. A few days later, I owned both the fear *and* the ring.

A month later, I was still reeling. My plan was to give myself some more time, to figure out what was rattling around in my head and why this vise grip had locked down on my heart. Truthfully, I was lost. I thought I loved Miska. I was sure I wanted to get married. So what was going on? I figured more time would cure my panic—at least that's what I was counting on.

Then I had a conversation that changed my life. I met with an older man to talk about some other issues I was facing. I don't think that I planned for the conversation to center on my botched engagement. But it did. With little small talk, he

moved us right there. He didn't have much to say, really. No big words or amazing psychological insights. He didn't impart any mystic spiritual wisdom. What he said was this: "Winn, it's time to be a man." He told me to make a decision. Now. To stop dangling Miska along. To figure out what I wanted. And to move.

I did. That night, a man on a mission, I drove six hours to her house and got down on my knee a second time and asked her if she would marry me. She said yes, and my world was forever changed. Because a wiser, older man had stepped into my life.

Many of us live with questions, wondering if anyone will step into our life. Who will guide us when we face complexities and questions and myriads of choices? Who will help us when fear or shame or lethargy descends on our hearts? Who will tell us we will be okay when it seems that everything we know has crumbled? Who will have the courage to tell us we are wrong when we have deluded ourselves into believing just the opposite? Who will instruct us in matters of the soul? Who will help us become the woman or the man God intends for us to be?

Friends are good in such times, and we would each do well to have two or three soul friends who enter into such places with us. However, a friend is not always what we need; even a deep one will not always do. We need someone who is more weathered than us, someone whose courage has been tested and whose wisdom carries a certain moxie. We need someone unflustered by our circumstances, unimpressed with our hubris, unafraid of our vileness. We need someone who speaks with gravity, whose words are simple and straight and true. We need someone with authority.

Our hearts ache for a woman or man, older and wiser, to speak strong words of hope and life, for the wisdom that comes only with many long years lived in the way of Jesus.

I have recently been in conversation with two friends, each a man who is trying to figure out who he is and what he is about. Both of them said the same thing: “I want someone to tell me what to do.” Whether we face chaos and darkness or are merely attempting the lifelong process of following Jesus in our world, there are times when we need the voice of someone whose life and age and wisdom insist we be quiet and listen. I believe this to be a human constant. We need guides. Old or young, woman or man, we are all the same. And, eventually, most of us come to this conclusion: a spiritual life is not something we can do on our own.

But sadly, many of us are alone, and we don't know where to turn. I have an early memory. I was young, perhaps three. Apparently, there are certain traumas that lodge themselves in a young psyche and won't let go. My parents and I were in a K-Mart, where I vaguely remember some voice announcing a Blue-Light Special being offered among the labyrinth of shopping aisles. Something must have grabbed my attention, and I darted off, slipping away from my parents and into the exhilarating world of potential playthings. Soon, however, what was adventurous and enticing grew menacing and frightful. I realized I was alone. It was a new, terrifying experience to fling at a three-year-old soul. I don't know how long I stood there in panic, but now, in this terrifying place, I didn't know what to do. All I had were fear and questions. All I had was myself.

Thankfully, two attentive nuns noticed a very frightened young boy. They kindly came up beside me, stooped down, asked my name, and told me I would be okay. They took me

to the customer service counter, where a crackling voice hit the PA system, letting the entire store know that there was a little boy waiting for his parents. Within moments, Mom and Dad arrived and gathered me up. I was safe. I was home. Yet I had needed a guide—in this instance, two guides—to show me the way.

I am no longer a little boy, but I still need guides. One I have found is named François Fénelon. A French bishop who lived from 1651 until 1715, Fénelon lived and served during tumultuous times. Louis XIV sat on the French throne, and his court was notorious for its debased character. Louis' reign was characterized by lust for power, copious extravagance, and sexual perversions. Fénelon was intimately acquainted with both the lure and the repulsion of Louis' influence. He served for a time as the tutor for the king's grandson, the heir to the throne. Later, when Fénelon served a spiritual community farther away from the royal trappings, he continued to offer spiritual guidance for a number of younger friends still serving in Louis' court. Fénelon offered his wisdom to these young Christians most often through correspondence. He would write them letters, answering their questions, challenging their assumptions, guiding them in matters of the soul. Thankfully, many of these letters are preserved for us today.

There are a number of collections of Fénelon's correspondence, but one that has particular merit is a collection pieced together and translated into English in 1853. It was titled *Spiritual Letters*, and through these words of wisdom and direction, I found Fénelon becoming one of my guides. Words on a page from a voice long passed will never replace the immediate presence of a flesh-and-blood sage. However, Fénelon's voice—

preserved for us centuries later—is remarkably relevant. These words offer us a voice some of us might never hear otherwise.

Much of the power of Fénelon's voice is due to the form in which it comes. The fact that we are reading letters is central to how we must hear them. These are personal letters to particular people with urgent needs and questions. Fénelon is not waxing eloquent on theoretical maxims removed from pain or bewilderment or sin or shame. Fénelon has walked into the deep waters of fear and loneliness and disillusionment and regret. And he is holding out his hand, telling us to trust and to follow him and his Jesus forward. As I read Fénelon, I wish I had a contemporary guide like him, gifted for this unique spiritual direction, who is simply a letter or a phone call or an e-mail away. But even while I hope for such guides, I do have Fénelon. The world he speaks to is not so different from my own. The young pilgrims he guides are certainly little different from me. In Fénelon, we each can have a guide . . . if we will hear him.

I am most intrigued with the context in which Fénelon writes. Most of his young friends were situated in the middle of a place where sin and power reigned. Their world was steeped in power grabs and self-promotion and a commitment to giving one's self to any whim or passing desire that might shuffle by. Notions of peace and discipline and sacrifice and mercy were entirely out of favor, almost unknown. How would these correspondents love and obey Jesus in the midst of such depravity? This question and the culture that forced it form the background to Fénelon's letters. Though he rarely refers to such realities overtly, it is the steady milieu in which he writes. He encourages a tribe of young disciples to seek a subversive and radical life of incarnation. He never encourages them to do

the easy thing and withdraw from the darkness surrounding them. Rather, he encourages them to, like Jesus who came as God in the flesh, incarnate a new way in the very middle of the old way. Fénelon prods his correspondents toward the improbable. He suggests that they subvert the lies by simply living the truth.

Many of us long for a wise elder voice to provide us with spiritual direction. We do not want to be coddled or cajoled. We do not want to be given small-minded moralisms. We long for depth and authenticity. We do not want a quick fix or a trite answer. We just want a wiser voice, one who knows God and his ways. And we want to learn how to live in our world in a manner that is truly good. If we will listen to Fénelon, we will find much of what we seek.

First Conversation

Why Is God So Peculiar?

It is a stark truth when we
first run up against it:

God isn't always the safe bet or the sure thing.

God disappoints us, and this disappointment

can be the bitterest kind. It often comes in

those tender places where our hearts

are most vulnerable or most hopeful

or most desperate. We believe

God will act for us, and

sometimes . . . we hear

nothing.

Our disorientation is understandable; we seem set up for it. Often, when we come to faith, it is because we need protection. We need protection from our sin, from ourselves, from loneliness or despair, from all the assaults on our heart and our soul. These are primal needs, and they draw us to God because we realize that we are helpless on our own. It is easy then to see that early in our spiritual journey, we can succumb to the temptation to believe that God is the one who makes everything right, all the time, in the manner and at the moment we require. There is some truth here. Scripture is so bold as to tell us that God will not disappoint us. But he does. How do we make sense of this?

Spiritual guides of most every century have attempted to tell us this truth: there is a difference between what we think God should do for us and what God actually does for us. There is a difference between whom we imagine God to be and who God actually is. Becoming a follower of God is hard because it requires that we submit ourselves fully to a God who is other than us. We must let go of our insistence that we know best what we need. We must let go of our demands that God act when and how we demand.

With each letting go, we release layers of our self-protection. This self-protection is our futile attempt to manage life. It's the same seductive force pushing at us to attempt to manage God. But God won't leave us to wallow there. He will help us, but he must upset our addiction to control. He will have to unravel all the demands we have placed on him. This is why God's disappointment is necessary. He is helping us, peeling back our fingers, loosening our white-knuckled grip from our life. He has to; if we will ever be free in his care, he has to.

Free in God's care—that's where we're headed. But we aren't there yet. It will take a lifetime to get us there. For now, there are days when prayers are unanswered or when hopes go unfulfilled. Jobs don't pan out. Relationships fall apart. Mentors and friends and spouses may leave us empty. God may seem silent. Sometimes he moves in ways we would never have imagined, and his movement leaves us breathless with thankfulness and joy. At other times, we will be just sure God is going to set things right or intervene or show us a way out of our suffering. He doesn't, though, and God's unpredictability leaves us bewildered.

God is peculiar, Fénelon would say. And I think these peculiar patches in the soul are where Fénelon has some of his best wisdom to offer. He has great hope that God—in the end—will not disappoint us, because, in the end, God has given us his full self. The path takes strange bends, though. God moves in strange, peculiar ways. We desperately need wise spiritual guides to point out the way, to tell us to keep moving, to put a hand on our shoulder and tell us that the darkness will not consume us, to tell us that God's peculiar ways are signals of grace, and that we must just wait and see.

WINN COLLIER

To a Friend Facing God's Hard Mercy

Dear friend,

It might not seem obvious to you, but I am convinced that God is treating you as one of his friends. It's plain as day. God's friendship is obvious as he hands you crosses, provides you with space to suffer, and offers you opportunities, even to squander your self-honor—if you wish it. It will be hard, but is a *good* hard. The suffering will draw you into God. Are you up for it?

The means that God initiates to draw a soul to himself burrow in and do a much quicker and more skillful work than any effort we would attempt of our own devising. God slices self-love at its very root. However, for all our work and self-discipline, we would never be able to dig as far as God. God knows all the ways our self-love winds and hides, and God attacks it even where it has dug in the deepest.

If we had strength and faith enough to trust that God would take care of us, and if we were brave enough to follow God wherever he would want to lead us, we would have no need to exert great mental energy in order to grow in faith. However, our faith is weak, and we are convinced we have to know all the answers from God before we launch out on the journey. This makes our road longer and our spiritual transformation slower.

Abandon yourself entirely to God. Recklessly abandon yourself to God as long as you breathe on this earth. Let loose. You are in good hands. You can be self-abandoned because you will never be God-abandoned.

To a Friend Finding Hope in Humility

Dear friend,

Often, I pray to God that he will hold you near him, with tender strength. That is what I pray that God will do. This is what I pray that *you* will do: I pray that you will be courageous enough to willingly walk the hard way, the way of humility. Humility is the most essential thing for you right now. This submissive path you must take will actually help you with the wide range of difficulties you face. The journey, if you allow it, will teach you willingness to learn and to listen. Even better, this willingness to humbly receive what God has to teach you will eventually smooth out your rough road. If you choose to resist God (which is the same as resisting humility), you will bear more blame than a lot of other people who have never faced the challenges you have faced. These challenges are a gift, an invitation into a deep journey. Don't squander it.

On the one hand, you have received large doses of light and grace. The truth has been illuminated to you. Now become humble with your fresh-lit truth, like a little child. On the other hand, no one else has experienced what you have. Hard and distressing experiences hurl you into churning, chaotic waters. As you desperately splash around and fight to stay afloat, you surrender to the humble truth that you need help. The rough, humbling waters have wrecked your self-confidence.

And this is good. There is hope in the humility we find on a hard path and in rough waters.

Whenever our weakness is so obvious that we cannot deny it, we might think we are bankrupt. Oddly, however, we are on the cusp of amazing profit if we allow this weakness to make us humble and obedient. I pray the Lord will hold you and love you exactly where you are!

To a Delightfully Impoverished Friend

Dear friend,

Everything in your life plays its part in uncovering the true identity of your soul. However, there is no need to fear that you will be taken under. The God who loves you will not allow your temptations to have more muscle than the strength you have to face them. God will use your hardship to elbow you forward.

But we must not look obsessively inward, forever curious to see how well we are progressing, or how much our spiritual stamina is growing. We shouldn't even give much energy toward trying to see precisely how God is working in us. You won't be able to see much anyway—most of God's work is invisible. But don't worry; invisibility doesn't make it any less potent. God works best (and most often) in secret.

We would never get over ourselves if God always worked out in the open where we could always see him, with God always bringing some grand miracle to our rescue. It is difficult for God to do a good work if he is limited to working only in broad daylight. It is difficult for God to do a good work if he is limited to using only what is comfortable or easy or obvious.

We will not always be aware of what God is up to. We will not always have a firm grasp on our life and what God is crafting of it. We are going to have to let it loose. Letting loose will allow us to follow God into these shadow places. To follow God, we must walk into the cross, and to walk into the cross is to walk into darkness and poverty, nakedness and death.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ did not say, *If anyone wants to follow me, all he needs to do is enjoy himself and be drunk with*

everything he thinks he wants and feel smug satisfaction over how perfect he is. Christ did not say, If anyone wants to follow me, all she needs to do is perfect her image and be forever looking at herself in the mirror to make sure she has everything together. Quite the opposite, Jesus' words are: If anyone wants to follow me, I will show them the road they must take. All they need to do is say no to themselves. Next they can pick up their cross. And after they have done these two things, they can follow me along a path that will take them perilously close to dangerous precipices. They will see nothing but death all around them.

How is that? What does that do to our thought that God should always keep us safe from temptation and danger? The apostle Paul talks about the strong human desire to be clothed well, to be snug and safe. However, the truth is that we need to be stripped naked. Then, when we are naked, Christ can finally be our clothes, our protection, our comfort.

Give way to God. Surrender. Allow him to wreck the beautiful self-image you have spent so much time creating. Let God dig into the most hidden corner of your heart where this self-obsession lurks. Jesus died on a cross because you are dirty and sinful—your filthiness, your lack, is no surprise to him. But God wants to clean away your filth, and then to fill you up with goodness. Let him. It might not seem like it, but this is a wonderful thing when you have nothing, when you are impoverished. Feel the joy of having nothing, absolutely nothing. Feel the joy of being entirely at Jesus' mercy. Feel the alive pleasure of no longer clinging to your own so-called beauty, but hoping deeply in (and for) the beauty of Jesus.

God's romance is peculiar, requiring us to go against our instincts. We give everything we are and have to God; we give way to complete poverty. Yet, even as we do what seems foolish,

we find God being amazingly generous, filling us back up. God holds nothing back; God gives us all of himself. We are then every bit as beautiful as God is. We are then just as full as God is full. God's love will drown us then because—and I told you this was strange—God will be loving himself. God will have taken away all our ugliness and will have filled us with his beauty—and God finds his beauty immensely attractive.

Listen to me with this. Believe it. I know that when you taste this truth, it will seem bitter, but if you will hear it, it will feed your heart well. You will need to die to yourself, the ultimate impoverishment. But this death is the only true life, the only way to be filled. Trust what I am saying. Don't listen to your self-protective voice. That voice is the grand seducer, more powerful even than the serpent that deceived our mother Eve. That voice coddles you into being afraid to risk what God requires. Trust me: you will find happiness if you simply listen to and obey the *other* voice.

To a Friend Under God's Knife

Dear friend,

We think our eagerness to serve others is always a noble thing. Unfortunately, too often it actually surges from only natural inclinations of human generosity. Worse is when our supposed generosity actually spurts from a polished-up version of plain selfishness, where we gain something (like a good image or a good dose of self-righteousness) from the transaction. If this is the case, we will often find ourselves eventually disdaining those we are serving or simply growing spent and frustrated with the whole thing. However, true charity is simple. It stays steady, always offering the same genuineness, the same love, towards our neighbor. True love gives itself away, stays humble, and ignores all the selfishness that obstructs its flow. Anything that isn't this kind of love—simple love—well, cut it off.

This is the way God works, always has: God had Abraham and all who followed him do the cutting work of circumcision to symbolize the work God was doing in them. Now, God still does this same kind of cutting; only now it's invisible to the human eye. God does what Scripture calls a "circumcision of the heart." He makes us his children, giving us all of his care. And, again like Abraham, God asks us to trust him, to follow without having to know all the details about where we are heading or how we are going to make the trip. It won't seem like it, but letting God cut away at us is a good thing.

We cannot cut that deep—even Abraham could cut only what was on the outside, never the heart. We don't know what we need. We have no idea what in us most needs to be sliced. Left to ourselves, we would not be able to find or reach the

exact spot that needs the swift knife, but God, knife in hand, goes right to it.

We are too infatuated with ourselves, and we don't care much for pain. So if the cutting were up to us, we would always pull our hand back. We would never let the knife pierce where it must. We don't have the courage to wound ourselves in the truly deep place, where the pain will be severe, but God doesn't hold back. God has the courage. He will cut in unexpected places, where we never would. God's stab goes deep, and it leaves nothing untouched that needs his knife. God is the surgeon, and our self-absorption is the cancer. God's knife will hurt, and so it is okay to cry out in pain. However, we must make sure we do not squirm out from under God's steady, skilled hand as it moves in with the scalpel. If we fight too much, God's surgery will not be able to do all that is necessary. As we remain still under the knife, we need to do only one thing: receive every cut, every single one.

I admire John the Baptist. He forgot all about himself, and he gave all his attention to Christ. He pointed to Christ. He was a lone voice crying in the wilderness. John's one purpose was to prepare people for Jesus' coming. He even sent Jesus all his own disciples. It wasn't so much John the Baptist's quirky and ascetic life (like living in the woods, eating locusts, and wearing camel-hair clothes) that made him a great man, a powerful prophet. No, his greatness came through the way he lived, the way he gave his entire self to Jesus. John couldn't possibly have imagined how God wanted to speak through him. John's only concern was to obey God, to say what God wanted him to say, peculiar as it must have seemed.

John obeyed. And God spoke.

To a Friend Finding Happiness in Suffering

Dear friend,

I want you to know how deeply sorry I am for all your unhappiness. This life is a time of living between: between God's promises and God's making those promises reality. In the between, then, we must carry the cross. There is much hope, though. Soon, we won't suffer at all. When we are living in (and watching over) God's kingdom, we will have joy, not sadness. God's fingers will wipe away our tears. When you are with the God of all pleasure, pain and wishing for more won't exist. This delight is what is ahead for you. The sorrow and hardness you face now is only a blip on the broad timeline of your life.

However, it would be a huge mistake to miss what God has for you *now*, in this place. It would be easy in your suffering to miss how valuable the cross (and even your suffering) actually is. But it is more valuable than you could imagine—don't lose one thing this cross of suffering longs to teach you. It is hard, yes. Something far better is ahead for you, absolutely. But this hard place *now* also offers you God.

Here's something to help *now*: when you suffer, do it humbly and in peace. We have a tendency to exaggerate our difficulties, to make them appear worse than they actually are. We can even play them out in our mind, letting our imagination gallop off, making the whole experience truly bigger than life. Just suffer simply. When we take the simple route, without all the selfish drama, it makes the suffering smaller. It's like carrying only half a cross. If we are able to suffer simply, fully aware of love,

we will find happiness. Here is the wildest part: our happiness will not be *in spite* of our cross, but *because* of it.

True love finds pleasure when it is giving to, suffering for, someone it deeply loves; and we are suffering for God. This cross and this suffering make us more like God. Deep pleasure and intimacy come from being bonded to God in this way.

Second Conversation

How Do I Pursue Spiritual Maturity?

How do we grow up?

For any of us who want to become more serious in our faith or more committed to the way of Jesus, this is the question we inevitably ask. Our attempts to answer the question have even spawned an entire mega-industry of propaganda and merchandise. As with fad diets, we can spend an entire life hopping from one promised fix to the next: a highly touted experience. A seven-step plan. A bracelet. A bumper sticker. The next big
b o o k .

Fénelon invites us to choose another way. Fénelon suggests that the way of growing into spiritual maturity is far harder and far easier than all this. It is harder because we can't ingest maturity by popping a pill, gulping down words, or taking a weekend retreat. Books and experiences might help, but they aren't the "fix." No high-profile guru or slickly marketed system will manufacture maturity. It comes only when Jesus is allowed room to dig in and root around and do the slow, often painful work. It's hard, and it takes time.

Maturity is also easier than we might think, because the focus isn't on us. This is the problem with all faddish efforts. They often focus on our energy, our resilience, our discipline. All this self-focus is lethal to spiritual growth. It is like poison sprayed on fresh spring sprouts. It stops them, dead on the vine. Isn't it strange then that so many attempts at spiritual growth focus so much on us?

Left to ourselves, floundering amid all the spiritual debris, we feel hopeless. If these other paths are short-lived and doomed to disappoint, what do we do? We wait. We ratchet down all the nervous energy and the compulsion to get it all squared away. Now. Immediately. We wait, and we listen. And when God sends us that subversive guide, like "one crying in the wilderness," we then get up and follow.

Fénelon is such a voice. He is quiet, yet full of authority. He has such a different way. He doesn't offer a plan. He offers Jesus. To some friends, Fénelon advises they need to move. To other friends, he suggests they sit still. Some friends need to practice more obedience, while others need to stop trying so hard. The context for developing spiritual maturity is a relationship, not a laboratory. Our spiritual lives come of age through conversations and friendships, through stories told

and heard, through learning who we are and how to listen to the God who best knows who we are. This is why we need a guide, not a method—because there is no single way to grow into Jesus.

WINN COLLIER

To a Friend in Pain

My dear daughter,

I have heard that you are very sick. I love you dearly, and I am suffering with you.

This might be hard to hear, but even though I feel strong compassion for your pain, I must kiss the hand that is afflicting you. In fact, I am going to ask you to also kiss this afflicting hand with tender thankfulness. The truth is that up to now, you have abused your health. You have disregarded the pleasure you should receive from caring for yourself. The sickness and pain you now experience are the natural result of a long season of abusing yourself.

This is my prayer for you: that God will weaken your self-obsessed spirit more than he weakens your body. I pray that God will give your body all the care and comfort it needs, but I also pray that God will entirely crush your internal addiction to self. We are actually just coming to a place of strength when we begin to see how weak and anemic we truly are. When we see our feebleness, then we can begin to see where we have run off course. We can begin to repent and change. We can actually receive wise, helpful words from others, words we were unwilling to hear before. We can stop thinking we have all the answers. We can abandon the foolish arrogance of assuming we always know what is best for ourselves.

When we see our weakness, we speak with simplicity and humility even when we are convinced we are speaking the truth. We don't get edgy when we are being corrected, and we don't flinch when someone points out some darkness in us. When we are weak—and know it—we don't feel the compulsion to

hold onto so much. Even while we are open to being corrected by others, we are far less snappy to correct other people. We speak words of rebuke only if we absolutely must—and we offer hard words only to those who want to hear them. We simply speak what we think we see, but we aren't dogmatic about it. We know we could be wrong, and that's okay. Nothing is at stake for us—we aren't trying to hold onto our reputation, and we aren't trying to be the spiritual authority for everyone else. We don't care about being perceived as some wise spiritual sage. We just give what we have to give to whoever wants to receive it. It's pretty simple.

I pray for something else, too. I am praying that God will sit you down in a place where you are drinking in grace—and that God will hold you there and won't let you wiggle away. God has started a deep transformation in you, and I pray that he will continue. This is a good prayer; it's the same one the apostle Paul prayed in Philippians.

It isn't up to you, anyway; it's all up to God. We need to learn to be kind and patient and honest with ourselves. There's no need to flatter ourselves and try to talk ourselves into believing we're better than we are. There's nothing to hide, nothing to defend. At the same time, there's no need to lacerate ourselves. There's no need to hate our humanness and our weakness. God knows where we are and is working good in us. If we can allow ourselves to be where we are, right there with God, that very spot will be a place of transformation. We'll find we're in a place that's ready-made to renovate us with the subtle, powerful tenderness of grace.

But let this work happen quietly and peacefully. Don't rush into it, all fired up to get busy. Don't think God's transformation is going to happen in a day, and then you can get on with your