

## Pastor Stef's Book Review – June 2018

A few years ago I turned forty. With forty being the possible half way point of my life, it got me thinking about how one continues to grow spiritually in the second half of their life. Unfortunately, I have watched too many people stop growing and remain perpetual infants in their spiritual beliefs, attitudes and behaviours - some even regress. In all honesty, it is quite scary. I don't want to go there, but I also know my default will be to head right down that path. Christian growth doesn't just happen, but takes effort and discipline. Yes, we are saved by grace, but we are also saved to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling* (Philippians 2:12).

It was in the midst of these reflections that I was introduced to **Ronald Rolheiser's** book ***Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, 2014**. *Sacred Fire* looks specifically at the second half of the Christian journey through the picture of the prodigal sons (intentionally plural). In the first half of our Christian development we are a lot like the son who ran away as we need to work through what have traditionally been called "the sins of the flesh." The younger brother was tempted by things like lust, greed and gluttony until he *came to his senses*. In the second half of our Christian growth, however, we struggle with becoming like the son who stayed home. Now the more insidious sins of the heart, like bitterness, anger and pride, try to take us out. This insight alone was worth the price of the book. I certainly see the truth of this in my life, and I'm coming to recognize who the enemy is and what his tactics are is half the battle.

This book is gentle and not finger waving. It works to peel the layers off the heart by exposing how both success and failure can lead to things like arrogance, depression, cynicism and rigidity. I found chapter seven on living as a blessing to others and chapter eight on simplicity to be extremely practical. When we become a person who spends their time blessing others rather than wanting everything/body to satisfy us, and when we give away our skills, knowledge, possessions and positions, rather than hoarding them, we become life givers to both others and ourselves.

I realize this is the second month in a row where I am recommending a Catholic writer. As a general rule, when it comes to the deeper Christian life, the Catholics often have a lot better material out there than us Protestants. I have my theories as to why that is, but this is not the place to expound on them. What I do know is that spiritual growth cannot be done on one's own, and I thank God for Catholic coaches like Ronald Rolheiser to help guide me along the way. More than anything I long to hear Jesus' words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And that means setting patterns in my life now that become habits to help me through the storms that are still to come so that my house is built on a rock and not sand.