



EXCERPT



Finding Freedom in Constraint

Reimagining Disciplines as a Communal Way of Life

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The constraints of the spiritual life, practiced in community, are what set us free and shape us into the way of Christ. Re-anchoring spiritual practices within monasticism, religious orders, and the early church fathers, these six core practices from Jared Patrick Boyd form in us greater freedom to become people who love as God loves.

Something is Missing from Our Formational Practices

The problem with leaning into a life of *constraint*, which is the primary way I will be talking about the spiritual disciplines, is that we almost exclusively have tried to do it alone. We have few living models for what it looks like to do it together. This is an unfortunate and unforeseen consequence of the Reformation, which systematically threw out the “baby” of the religious life of monks and nuns along with the “bathwater” that the Reformers wanted to throw out—however you want to describe that bathwater. What was lost in the Reformation (for those of us who are not Catholic or Orthodox) was the institution of monastic communities bearing witness to a communal way of life that centered on the practice of constraint.

Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, and others such as David Benner, Ruth Haley Barton, and Kathleen Norris, have drunk deeply from the life that the monastic tradition has brought us. They’ve gifted us with writing about the riches they themselves have gleaned in conversations with abbots and sisters at retreats in monasteries and convents. But the key component that has been left out in most of our attempts to lean into these practices is a commitment to doing so alongside others in a vulnerable way.

Call it spiritual companionship.

Call it spiritual friendship.

Call it monastic.

But the spiritual disciplines were never meant to be primarily practiced alone. We are meant to share the joys and burdens of the practice of spiritual disciplines with others. The formation that comes from practicing constraint happens mostly when we practice alongside others.

This book is an invitation to practice constraint in community.

Over the past ten years, I have been slowly trying to reimagine the tradition that has carried the communal practice of constraint in monasteries and religious orders. I believe that monasticism and religious orders as institutions of the church will have a resurgence in the days ahead. The result of that reimagining work, and my own contribution to that hoped-for future, is the Order of the Common Life—an ecumenical religious order for the twenty-first century.⁹ Since the middle of the twentieth century there have been several men and women living in monastic communities or as part of a traditional Catholic religious order who have made it clear that, unless this tradition is reimaged and rearticulated, it will die. Thomas Merton spent much of his own monastic vocation thinking and writing about what is at the core of this tradition. Merton himself wondered how we might authentically carry it—reimagine it—for the sake of the church.



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Jared Patrick Boyd is a pastor (Vineyard USA), spiritual director, and founding director of the Order of the Common Life, a missional monastic order reimagining religious vocations for the 21st century. In local pastoral ministry he works to bring together the contemplative, charismatic, and sacramental streams of the church. Jared and his wife have four daughters and live in the west-side neighborhood of Franklinton in Columbus, Ohio. He is the author of *Imaginative Prayer* and *Finding Freedom in Constraint*.

I've committed the rest of my life to the same question that Merton was asking: How do we authentically continue this tradition? We have invited men and women from around the world to consider and discern whether or not they have what has been traditionally referred to as a *religious vocation*. We lead people through a multi-year discernment process around our own rule of life. Our primary *charism* (gift) that we offer the world is the work of helping people notice and nurture the work of God in their lives and in the lives of others. We believe that the most important human experience is the experience of the love of God. You can explore more about our dispersed community and read our rule of life at orderofthecommonlife.org.

In this book, I offer three meditations, a practical overview, six practices of constraint meant to be done in community, and a very short invitation. I have just one hope for you: that you can begin a journey of finding freedom through the practice of constraint, sustained by the presence of others who are on the journey with you.

This book centers around the practice of constraint, but at the center of it all is the ability to see a greater degree of the love of God. Most of us are not actively looking for ways for our life to be constrained. When I first mentioned this project to a friend and got to the part about challenging people to take on some constraint, his honest response was "That sounds terrible." I offer a vision of why we need constraint, and I hope that you will welcome more constraint than you ever thought possible.

-Adapted from the introduction



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