

Brother Lawrence (1611-1691)

“The Practice of the Presence of God” by Brother Lawrence, Whitaker House, 95 pages.

The First Conversation (pp. 7-9)

Brother Lawrence told me that God had been especially good to him in his conversion. He was eighteen at the time, and still in the world. He told me that it had all happened one winter day, as he was looking at a barren tree. Although the tree's leaves were indeed gone, he knew that they would soon reappear, followed by blossoms and then fruit. This gave him a profound impression of God's providence and power which never left him. Brother Lawrence still maintains that this impression detached him entirely from the world and gave him such a great love for God that it hasn't changed in all of the forty years he has been walking with Him.

It is necessary to always be aware of God's presence by talking with Him throughout each day...

Instead of letting faith rule our lives, we are guided by our petty, everyday, mechanical prayers, which are always changing.

We need to be faithful, even in dry periods. It is during those dry spells that God tests our love for Him.

When we are willing to accept God's help and guard our souls according to His desires, we may commune with him whenever we like.

The Second Conversation (pp. 10-14)

In the beginning a little effort was needed to form the habit of continuously conversing with God, telling Him everything that was happening. But after a little careful practice, God's love refreshed me, and it all became quite easy.

Speak very simply and frankly to God.

Do everything for the love of God, asking as often as possible for grace to do His work.

Simply confess to God, without pleading with Him or making excuses.

Thinking often spoils everything; evil usually begins with our thoughts. We should reject any thoughts which distract us from serving the Lord or which undermine our salvation.

The Third Conversation (pp. 15-18)

Brother Lawrence confided to me that the foundation of his spiritual life was the faith which revealed to him the exalted position of God. Once this became secure in the depths of his heart, he was easily able to do all his actions for the love of God.

His heartfelt goal was to think of nothing but God. If he did allow some time to pass without thinking of Him, he did not grow upset about it. Once he confessed his weakness to God, he returned to Him with all the more confidence and joy because he had found himself so unhappy apart from God's presence. If he felt any ungracious thought or any temptation generating, he would not panic or feel helpless to resist it. This was because his past experience of God's faithful assistance allowed him to wait until just the right moment to call out. When the time came, he would address himself to God, and the evil thoughts would vanish right away.

Before he had experienced God's swift help in his affairs, he had attempted to plan every detail, doing the job in his own strength. But now, acting with childlike simplicity in God's sight, he did everything for the love of God, thanking Him for His guidance.

Neither skill nor knowledge is needed to go to God, he added. All that is necessary is a heart dedicated entirely and solely to Him out of love for Him above all others.

The Fourth Conversation (pp. 19-22)

Brother Lawrence said his prayers consisted totally and simply of God's presence. His soul was resting in God, having lost its awareness of everything but love of Him. When he wasn't in prayer, he felt practically the same way. Remaining near to God, he praised and blessed Him with all his strength.

God is not so impressed with the dimensions of our work as with the love in which it is done. And we should not be discouraged if we fail in the beginning. The practice would eventually cause our efforts to become a pleasurable habit that we would do without thinking.

The final goal of our Christian life is to be entirely lost in the love of God. We should desire to love Him as perfectly as we can, in this life as well as in Eternity.

The First Letter (pp. 25-28)

For more than forty years, this brother's principal endeavor has been to stay as close as possible to God, doing, saying, and thinking nothing that might displease Him. He has no reason for doing this, except to show his gratitude for God's pure love.

Brother Lawrence became so accustomed to God's Divine presence that he relied on it for help on all sorts of occasions.

Whenever he sometimes strayed from this Divine presence, God immediately recalls him by communicating with him through the Holy Spirit. He responded faithfully to God's calling, either by offering his heart to God, by a tender, loving look, or by some affectionate words, such as, "My God, I am all Yours; do what You will with me."

Imagine what contentment and satisfaction he enjoyed, possessing such an ever-present treasure! Compared to "blind men" who are content with too little. God has infinite treasures to give us. Why should we be satisfied with a brief moment of worship? With such meager devotion, we restrain the flow of God's abundant grace. If God can find a soul filled with a lively faith, He pours His grace into it in a torrent which, having found an open channel, gushes out exuberantly.

We must continually walk in God's Spirit, since in the spirit-life not to advance is to fall back.

The Second Letter (pp. 29-32)

It is necessary for the heart to be emptied of everything that would offend God. He wants to possess our heart completely. Before any work can be done in our soul, God must be totally in control.

There is no sweeter manner of living in the world than continuous communion with God. Only those who have experienced it can understand. However, we should not practice this for the sole purpose of gaining consolation from our problems. Rather, we should seek it because God wills it and out of love for Him.

Make a commitment never to deliberately stray from Him, to live the rest of your life in His holy presence. Don't do this in expectation of receiving heavenly comforts; simply do it out of love for Him.

The Third Letter (pp. 31-32)

My preference is to retire with Him to the deepest part of my soul as often as possible. When I am with Him there, nothing frightens me. But the slightest diversion away from Him is painful to me.

Adore Him and praise Him! There are so many ways we can thank Him. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us leads us to love God in a diversity of ways.

The Fourth Letter (pp. 33-34)

Remembering Him, praising Him, asking for His grace, offering Him your troubles, or thanking Him for what He has given you will console you all the time.

You don't have to pray out loud; He's nearer than you can imagine.

We can make our heart a chapel where we can go anytime to talk to God privately.

Train yourself to show your love for Him ... Offer your heart to Him at every moment. Don't restrict your love of Him with rules or special devotions. Go out in faith, with love and humility.

The Fifth Letter (pp. 35-39)

During the first ten years of my walk with the Lord, I worried that my walk wasn't good enough. Because I couldn't forget my past sins, I felt very guilty when I thought of all the grace He had shown me. During this time, I used to fall often and then get up again. It seemed that everything - even God - was against me, and that only faith was on my side. Sometimes I believed I felt this way because I was trying to show, at the beginning of my walk, the same maturity it had taken other Christians years to achieve.

When I finally reached the point where I expected the rest of my life to be very difficult, I suddenly found myself wholly changed. My soul, which had always been troubled, finally came to rest in a profound inner peace. Since that time, I have been serving God simply, in humility and faith. Out of love, I try not to say, do, or think anything that might offend Him. My only request is that He do whatever He pleases with me.

I feel unable to express what is going on inside me right now. I'm not anxious about my purpose in life, because I only want to do God's will. I wouldn't even lift a straw from the ground against His order or for any other motive than love for Him. Pure love of Him is all that keeps me going.

I have given up all my intercessory prayers to focus my attention on remaining in His holy presence. I keep my attention on God in a simple, loving way. This is my soul's secret experience of the actual, unceasing presence of God.

To sum up, I am sure that my soul has been with God for more than thirty years. I consider God my King, against Whom I've committed all sorts of crimes. Confessing my sins to Him and asking Him to forgive me, I place myself in His hands to do whatever He pleases with me. This King, Who is full of goodness and mercy, doesn't punish me. Rather, He embraces me lovingly and invites me to eat at His table. He serves me Himself and gives me the keys to His treasury, treating me as His favorite. He converses with me without mentioning my sins or my forgiveness. My former habits are seemingly forgotten.

The Seventh Letter (pp. 41-42)

We have a God Who is infinitely good and Who knows what He is doing. He will come and deliver you from your present trouble in His perfect time and when you may least expect it. Thank Him for the strength and patience He is giving you, even in the midst of this trial, for it is an evident mark of His concern for you. Encourage yourself with His love and thank Him for everything.

The Eighth Letter (pp. 43-44)

You aren't the only one distracted from the presence of God. Our minds are so flighty. But remember that our God-given will governs all of our strength. It must recall the mind to God. Otherwise, our spirit may wander, dragging us down to the things of this earth.

I think the remedy for the problem is to confess our faults to God and humble ourselves before Him. It isn't necessary to be too verbose in prayer, because lengthy prayers encourage wandering thoughts. Simply present yourself to God as if you were a poor man knocking on the door of a rich man, and fix your attention on His presence. If your mind wanders at times, don't be upset, because being upset will only distract you more. Allow your will to recall your attention gently to God.

Another way to prevent the mind from wandering away from God during prayer is to train yourself to dwell in His presence all day long. This will provide a sort of "practice" for you, as you remind yourself to concentrate on Him.

The Ninth Letter (pp. 45-46)

It is not possible to become spiritually mature all at once.

We cannot avoid the dangers of life without God's continual help, so we should ask Him for it ceaselessly. But how can we ask for help unless we are with Him? To be with Him, we must cultivate the holy habit of thinking of Him often.

The Tenth Letter (pp. 47-48)

Think about God as often as you can, day and night, in everything you do. He is always with you. Just as you would be rude if you left a friend who was visiting you alone, why abandon God and leave Him alone? Do not forget Him! Think of Him often; adore Him ceaselessly; live and die with Him. That is the real business of a Christian; in a word, it is our profession. If we do not know it, we must learn it.