

edge shall be, the greater will be our love; and if our love of God were great, we should love Him equally in pains and pleasures.

Let us not content ourselves with loving God for the mere sensible favors, how elevated soever, which He has done or may do us. Such favors, though never so great, cannot bring us so near to Him as faith does in one simple act. Let us seek Him often by faith. He is within us; seek Him not elsewhere. If we do love Him alone, are we not rude, and do we not deserve blame, if we busy ourselves about trifles which do not please and perhaps offend Him? It is to be feared these trifles will one day cost us dear.

Let us begin to be devoted to Him in good earnest. Let us cast everything besides out of our hearts. He would possess them alone. Beg this favor of Him. If we do what we can on our parts, we shall soon see that change wrought in us which we aspire after. I cannot thank Him sufficiently for the relaxation He has vouchsafed you. I hope from His mercy the favor to see Him with a few days.\* Let us pray for one another.

I am, in our Lord,

Yours . . .

\* He took to his bed two days after, and died within the week.

*The  
Spiritual  
Maxims  
of  
Brother  
Lawrence*

## INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Herman of Lorraine, a seventeenth-century Carmelite now remembered as Brother Lawrence, is one of those master spirits whose words and influence cannot die. Undoubtedly millions of men and women in the centuries since the Thirty Years' War have found spiritual illumination through the simple but profound insights of Brother Lawrence's famous little book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

Now we are indebted to Miss Edith Allais of Hollywood, California, for helping us publish *The Spiritual Maxims of Brother Lawrence*. Miss Allais provided us with a copy of this out-of-print volume and suggested that we republish it. We are happy to be able to do so.

We have no clue to the identity of "H. C." who wrote the original preface, reprinted herewith. Nor do we know to what ancient edition of *The Practice of the Presence of God* the footnotes and page references refer. For the benefit of anyone who may want to check this out, we reproduce it all just as it was previously published.

To all in spiritual quest we commend this book.

THE PUBLISHERS

## PREFACE

Brother Lawrence is known to a wide circle of English readers by his "Conversations and Letters," and the numerous editions of that collection are a tribute to the appreciation of the deep spirituality of his teaching. It seems strange therefore that so little attention has been paid to his other writings. The "Spiritual Maxims" appear to have been almost entirely neglected; so far as it can be ascertained no English translation has been published since one at Edinburgh in 1741. It is to atone in some measure for this neglect that the translator offers this new rendering, in full confidence that the many who know Brother Lawrence through the "Conversations" and "Letters" will find here also exemplified the same deep spiritual insight.

The "Spiritual Maxims" were published originally together with the "Letters," the editor of the volume stating in his preface that on running through Brother Lawrence's letters he had found amongst them a manuscript entitled, "Spiritual Maxims, or Means for Attaining to the Presence of God." They deserve attention for two reasons. In a short "Life" of Brother Lawrence, written in 1691, we are told that "he committed his thoughts some-

vicar to M. de Chalons, Cardinal de Noailles. As far as possible, he allows his subject to speak for himself. "Nobody can paint the Saints so well as they themselves," he writes; "nothing can bring more clearly before you this servant of God, than his own words spoken in all the simplicity of his heart."

Under the title of "Gathered Thoughts" the translator has brought together a few scattered sayings of Brother Lawrence which have been collected for the most part from the short "Life" written in 1691. They are only fragments, but well merit being gathered.

Throughout the "Conversations" and the "Letters" there is one great theme which Brother Lawrence develops, the theme which cannot be expressed better than in the words of the Psalmist, "In Thy Presence is fulness of joy." We hear the same melody sounding through this little book—it could not well be otherwise. But is there not another equally insistent on the ear?—"The simplicity that is in Christ."

H. C.

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times to writing, but comparing what he had written with that which he had just experienced in his soul, he deemed it so inferior and so far removed from the inspired thoughts, with which he had been visited, of the greatness and goodness of God that often he felt compelled to tear it up at once." Apparently the "Maxims" and the "Letters" are the only writings which have survived. But the "Maxims" are important for a further reason. The "Letters" were written merely to deal with particular cases and difficulties brought to his notice from time to time, and they were addressed to the individual recipients alone.<sup>1</sup> The "Maxims," however, are in a different category. The careful arrangement adopted suggests matured thought, and the inference is not unreasonable that the intention of Brother Lawrence was to sum up in the "Maxims" his teaching, which in the form of letters was inevitably disconnected, in the hope that his message might thereby gain a wider and more general hearing.

The "Character" is a sketch of Brother Lawrence as he appeared to those who saw him in the daily round of life. The author is the chronicler of the "Conversations," probably M. Beaufort, grand

<sup>1</sup> "Letter I." p. 27.

*N.B.*—References in footnotes to the "Conversations" and the "Letters" of Brother Lawrence relate to the companion edition in this series of *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

“All things are possible to him who *believes*, they are less difficult to him who *hopes*, they are easier to him who *loves*, and still more easy to him who practices and perseveres in these three virtues.”

—BROTHER LAWRENCE

## SPIRITUAL MAXIMS

1. We must study ever to regard God and His Glory in all that we do, and say, and undertake. This is the *end* that we should set before ourselves, to offer to God a sacrifice of perfect worship in this life, as we hope to do through all eternity.<sup>1</sup> We ought firmly to resolve to overcome, with the grace of God assisting us, the many difficulties which will meet us in the spiritual life.
2. When we enter upon the spiritual life, we ought to consider thoroughly what we are, probing to the very depth. We shall find that we are altogether deserving of contempt, unworthy of the name of Christ, prone to all manner of maladies and subject to countless infirmities, which distress us and impair the soul's health, rendering us wavering and unstable in our humors and dispositions; in fact, creatures whom it is God's will to chasten and make humble by numberless afflictions and adversities, as well within as without.
3. We must believe steadfastly, never once doubting, that such discipline is for our good, that it is God's will to visit us with chastening, that it is

<sup>1</sup> “Conversation IV.” p. 23.

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the course of His Divine Providence to permit our souls to pass through all manner of sore experiences and times of trial, and for the love of God to undergo divers sorrows and afflictions for so long as shall seem needful to Him; since, without this submission of heart and spirit to the will of God, devotion and perfection cannot subsist.

4. A soul is the more dependent on grace, the higher the perfection to which it aspires; and the grace of God is the more needful for each moment, as without it the soul can do nothing. The world, the flesh, and the devil join forces and assault the soul so straitly and so untiringly that, without humble reliance on the ever-present aid of God, they drag the soul down in spite of all resistance. Thus to rely seems hard to nature, but grace makes it become easy, and brings with it joy.

OF NECESSARY PRACTICES FOR ATTAINING  
TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

1. That practice which is alike the most holy, the most general, and the most needful in the spiritual life is *the practice of the Presence of God*. It is *the schooling of the soul to find its joy in His Divine Companionship*, holding with Him at all times and at every moment humble and loving

converse, without set rule or stated method, in all time of our temptation and tribulation, in all time of our dryness of soul and disrelish of God, yes, and even when we fall into unfaithfulness and actual sin.

2. We should apply ourselves unceasingly to this one end, to so rule all our actions that they be little acts of communion with God; but they must not be studied, they must come naturally, from the purity and simplicity of the heart.

3. We must do all things thoughtfully and soberly without impetuosity or precipitancy, which denotes a mind undisciplined. We must go about our labors quietly, calmly, and lovingly, entreating Him to prosper the works of our hands; by thus keeping heart and mind fixed on God, we shall bruise the head of the evil one, and beat down his weapons to the ground.

4. When we are busied, or meditating on spiritual things, even in our time of set devotion, whilst our voice is rising in prayer, we ought to cease for one brief moment, as often as we can, to worship God *in the depth of our being*, to taste Him though it be in passing, to touch Him as it were by stealth. Since you cannot but know that God is with you in all you undertake, that He is at the very depth and centre of your soul, why should you not thus pause an instant from time to time in your outward business, and even in the act of prayer, to worship

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Him within your soul, to praise Him, to entreat His aid, to offer Him the service of your heart, and give Him thanks for all His loving-kindnesses and tender-mercies?

What offering is there more acceptable to God than thus throughout the day to quit the things of outward sense, and to withdraw to worship Him within the secret places of the soul? Besides by so doing we destroy the love of self, which can subsist only among the things of sense, and of which these times of quiet retirement with God rids us well-nigh unconsciously.

In very truth we can render to God no greater or more signal proofs of our trust and faithfulness, than by thus turning from things created to find our joy, though for a single moment, in the Creator. Yet, think not that I counsel you to disregard completely and for ever the outward things that are around us. That is impossible. Prudence, the mother of the virtues, must be your guide. Yet, I am confident, it is a common error among religious persons, to neglect this practice of ceasing for a time that, which they are engaged upon, to worship God in the depth of their soul, and to enjoy the peace of brief communion with Him. This digression has been long, and yet, it seemed to me, the matter demanded such. Let us return to our subject.

5. These our acts of worship are to be prompted and guided by *faith*. We must unfeignedly believe

that God is in very fact within our souls, and that we must worship Him and love Him and serve Him in spirit and in truth; that He sees all, and that unto Him all hearts are open, our own and those of all His creatures; that He is self-existent, whilst it is in Him that all His creatures live and move and have their being; that His Perfection is Infinite and Sovereign, and demands the full surrender of ourselves, our souls and bodies. In simple justice we owe Him all our thoughts and words and actions. Let us see to it that we pay our debt.

6. Necessity is laid upon us to examine ourselves with diligence to find out what are the virtues, which we chiefly lack, and which are the hardest for us to acquire; we should seek to learn the sins that do most easily beset us, and the times and occasions, when we do most often fall. In the time of struggle we ought to have recourse to God with perfect confidence, abiding steadfast in the Presence of His Divine Majesty; in lowly adoration we should tell out before Him our griefs and our failures, asking Him lovingly for the succor of His grace; and in our weakness we shall find in Him our strength.

OF HOW IT IS REQUIRED OF US TO WORSHIP  
GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

There are three points in this question which must be answered:—

1. To worship God in spirit and in truth means to offer to Him the worship that we owe. God is a Spirit; therefore we must worship Him in spirit and in truth,—that is to say, by presenting to Him a true and humble spiritual worship in the very depth of our being. God alone can see this worship, which, offered unceasingly, will in the end become as it were natural, and as if He were one with our soul, and our soul one with Him: practice will make this clear.

2. To worship God in truth is to acknowledge Him to be what He is, and ourselves as what in very fact we are. To worship Him in truth is to acknowledge with heart-felt sincerity what God in truth is,—that is to say, infinitely perfect, worthy of infinite adoration, infinitely removed from sin, and so of all the Divine attributes. That man is little guided by reason, who does not employ all his powers to render to this great God the worship that is His due.

3. Furthermore, to worship God in truth is to confess that we live our lives entirely contrary to

His will, and contrary to our knowledge that, were we but willing, He would fain make us conformable to Him. Who will be guilty of such folly as to withhold even for a moment the reverence and the love, the service and the unceasing worship that we owe to Him?

OF UNION OF THE SOUL WITH GOD

There are three degrees of union of the soul with God. The first degree is general, the second is virtual union, whilst the third is actual union.

1. That degree of union is the general which one finds, when the soul is united to God solely by grace.

2. Virtual union (which is in effect union though not in fact) is our state when, beginning any action by which we are united to God, we remain so united to Him by reason of that action for such time as it lasts.

3. Actual union is *the perfect union*. In the other degrees the soul is passive, almost as it were slumbering. In this actual union the soul is intensely active; quicker than fire are its operations, more luminous than the sun, unobscured by any passing cloud. Yet we can be deceived as to this union by our feelings; it is not a mere fleeting emotion, such



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as would prompt a passing cry "My God, I love Thee with my heart's full strength"; it is rather a state of soul—if I can but find words—which is deeply spiritual, and yet very simple, which fills us with a joy that is calm indeed, and with a love that is very humble and very reverent, which lifts the soul aloft to heights, where the sense of the love of God constrains it to adore Him, and to embrace Him with a tenderness that cannot be expressed, and which experience alone can teach us to understand.

4. All who aspire to union with the Divine should know that whatever can gladden the will is in fact pleasing to it, or at least so the will reckons it.

There is no one but must avow that God is beyond our understanding. To be united to Him it is needful therefore to deny to the will all tastes and pleasures, bodily and spiritual, that, being thus detached, it can be free to love God above all things. For if the will can in any measure come to know God, it can do so only through love.

The difference is great between the tastes and sentiments of the will and its working, since the will's tastes and sentiments are in the soul as in their bounds, whilst its working, which is properly love, finds its sole end in God.

OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The Presence of God is an applying of our spirit to God, or a realization of God as present, which is borne home to us either by the imagination or by the understanding.

2. I have a friend who these forty years past has been practicing through the understanding a realization of the Presence of God. To it he gives many other names; sometimes he calls it a simple *act*, or a clear and distinct *knowledge* of God; at other times, a *view* as through a glass, a *loving gaze*, an inward sense of God; yet again he terms it a *waiting* on God, a silent *converse* with Him, a *repose* in Him, the *life* and *peace* of the soul. Still, my friend tells me that all these ways, in which he has expressed his sense of the Presence of God, come to the same thing; and that the Presence fills his soul quite naturally, that it has come so to pass in this way.

3. He says that by unwearying efforts, by constantly recalling his mind to the Presence of God, a habit has been formed within him of such a nature that, so soon as he is freed from his ordinary labor, and not seldom even when he is engaged thereon, his soul lifts itself up above all earthly matters, without care or forethought on his part, and dwells as it were firmly stayed on God, as in its

centre and place of rest, faith almost always being his companion at such times. Then his soul's joy is full,—it is what he calls the *actual* Presence, and includes all other kinds and greatly more besides. Then it is he feels that only God and he are in the world, with Him he holds unbroken converse, asking from Him the supply of all his needs, and finding in His Presence fulness of joy.

4. Let us mark well, however, that this intercourse with God he holds *in the depth of his being*; there it is that the soul speaks to God, heart to heart, and over the soul thus holding converse there steals a great and profound peace. All that passes without concerns the soul no more than a fire of straw, which the more it flares, the sooner burns itself out; and rarely indeed do the cares of this world ever intrude to trouble the peace that is within.

5. But to come back to our consideration of the Presence of God, you must know that the tender and loving light of God's countenance kindles insensibly within the soul, which ardently embraces it, so great and so divine a fire of love to God, that one is perforce compelled to moderate the outward expression of the feelings.

6. Great would be our surprise, if we but knew what converse the soul holds at these times with God, who seems to so delight in this communion, that to the soul, which would fain abide ever with

Him, He bestows favors past numbering; and as if He dreaded lest the soul should turn again to things of earth, He provides for it abundantly, so that the soul finds in faith a nourishment divine, a joy that has no measure, beyond its utmost thought and desire; and this without a single effort on its part but simple consent.

7. The Presence of God is thus *the life and nourishment of the soul*, and with the aid of His grace, it can attain thereunto by diligent use of the means which I will now set out.

#### OF MEANS FOR ATTAINING UNTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The first is a *great purity of life*; in guarding ourselves with care lest we should do or say or think on anything, which might be displeasing to God; and, when any such thing happens, in taking heed to repent thereof, humbly begging His forgiveness.
2. The second is a *great faithfulness in the practice of His Presence*, and in keeping the soul's gaze fixed on God in faith, calmly, humbly, lovingly, without allowing an entrance to anxious cares and disquietude.
3. Make it your study, before taking up any task to look to God, be it only for a moment, as also

when you are engaged thereon, and lastly when you have performed the same. And forasmuch as without time and great patience this practice cannot be attained, be not disheartened at your many falls; truly this habit can only be formed with difficulty, yet when it is so formed, how great will be your joy therein!

Is it not right that the *heart* which is the first thing in us to have life, and which has dominion over all the body, should be the first and last to love and worship God, both when we begin and end our actions, be they spiritual or bodily, and generally in all the affairs of life? It is here therefore, in the heart, that we ought to strive to make a habit of this gaze on God; but that which is needful to bring the heart to this obedience we must do, as I have already said, quite simply, without strain or study.

4. Those who set out upon this practice let me counsel to offer up in secret a few words, such as "My God, I am wholly Thine. O God of Love, I love Thee with all my heart. Lord, make my heart even as Thine"; or such other words as love prompts on the instant. But take heed that your mind wanders not back to the world again; keep it fixed on God alone, so that, thus subdued by the will, it may be constrained to abide with God.

5. This practice of the Presence of God is somewhat hard at the outset, yet pursued faithfully,

it works imperceptibly within the soul most marvellous effects; it draws down God's grace abundantly, and leads the soul insensibly to the ever-present *vision* of God, loving and beloved, which is the most spiritual and most real, the most free and most life-giving manner of prayer.

6. Remember that to attain to this state, we must mortify the senses, inasmuch as no soul, which takes delight in earthly things, can find full joy in the Presence of God; to be with Him we must leave behind the creature.

#### OF THE BENEFITS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The first benefit which the soul receives from the Presence of God is that *faith grows more alive* and active in all the events of life, particularly when we feel our need, since it obtains for us the succor of His grace when we are tempted, and in every time of trial. Accustomed by this practice to take faith as guide, the soul, by a simple remembrance, sees and feels God present, and calls upon Him freely and with assurance of response, receiving the supply of all its needs. By faith, it would seem, the soul draws very near to the state of the Blessed,—the higher it advances, the more living does faith grow, until at last so piercing does the

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eye of faith become, that the soul can almost say—*faith is swallowed up in sight, I see and I experience.*

2. The practice of the Presence of God strengthens us in *hope*. Our hope grows in proportion as our knowledge; and in measure as our faith by this holy practice penetrates into the hidden mysteries of God, in like measure it finds in Him a beauty beyond compare, surpassing infinitely that of earth, as also that of the most holy souls and angels. Our hope grows and waxes ever stronger, sustained and enheartened by the fulness of the bliss, which it aspires to and even already tastes in part.

3. Hope breathes into the will a distrust of things seen, and sets it aflame with the consuming fire of Divine love; for God's love is in very truth a consuming fire, burning to ashes all that is contrary to His will: the soul thus kindled cannot live save in the Presence of God, and this Presence works within the heart a consecrated zeal, a holy ardor, a violent passion to see this God known and loved, and served and worshiped by all His creatures.

4. By the practice of the Presence of God, by steadfast gaze on Him, the soul comes to a knowledge of God, full and deep, to an *Unclouded Vision*: all its life is passed in unceasing acts of love and worship, of contrition and of simple trust, of praise and prayer, and service; at times indeed life

seems to be but one long unbroken practice of His Divine Presence.

I know that they are not many who reach this state; it is a grace which God bestows only on very few chosen souls, for this Unclouded Vision is a gift from His all-bounteous hand; yet, for the consolation of such as would fain embrace this holy practice, let me say that God seldom denies this gift to those who earnestly desire it; and if He do withhold this crowning mercy, be well assured that, by the practice of the Presence of God, with the aid of His all-sufficient grace, the soul can attain to a state, which approaches very nearly the Unclouded Vision.