

Fourth Conversation

by Brother Lawrence

Brother Lawrence teaches that cultivating a sense of God's presence in our daily lives is the key to spiritual growth and perfection in worship.

Scripture: Psalm 16:8, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Hebrews 11:6, James 1:2

Topics: "Sanctification", "Prayer Life"

Description

Brother Lawrence preaches about the manner of going to God, emphasizing the importance of hearty renunciation, continual conversation with God, and sanctification in common business. He highlights the significance of prayer, praise, and the presence of God in preventing discouragement and guiding our actions. Brother Lawrence stresses the need for a total surrender to God, trusting in His grace and making every action an act of love for God. He encourages a life of faith, hope, and charity, united with the will of God, and persevering in the practice of these virtues to become perfect worshippers of God.

Transcript

The manner of going to God. * Hearty renunciation. * Prayer and praise prevent discouragement. * Sanctification in common business. * Prayer and the presence of God. * The whole substance of religion. * Self-estimation * Further personal experience.

He discoursed with me very frequently, and with great openness of heart, concerning his manner of going to GOD, whereof some part is related already. He told me, that all consists in one hearty renunciation of everything which we are sensible does not lead to GOD; that we might accustom ourselves to a continual conversation with Him, with freedom and in simplicity. That we need only to recognize GOD intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done.

That in this conversation with GOD, we are also employed in praising, adoring, and loving him incessantly, for His infinite goodness and perfection. That, without being discouraged on account of our sins, we should pray for His grace with a perfect confidence, as relying upon the infinite merits of our LORD. That GOD never failed offering us His grace at each action; that he distinctly perceived it, and never failed of it, unless when his thoughts had wandered from a sense of GOD's Presence, or he had forgot to ask His assistance.

That GOD always gave us light in our doubts, when we had no other design but to please Him. That our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for GOD's sake, which we commonly do for our own. That it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain works, which they performed very imperfectly, by reason of their human or selfish regards. That the most excellent method he had found of going to GOD, was that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing men, [Gal. i. 10; Eph. vi. 5, 6.] and (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of GOD.

That it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times. That we are as strictly obliged to adhere to GOD by action in the time of action, as by prayer in its season. That his prayer was nothing else but a sense of the presence of GOD, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but Divine love: and that when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with GOD, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy; yet hoped that GOD would give him somewhat to suffer, when he should grow stronger.

That we ought, once for all, heartily to put our whole trust in GOD, and make a total surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us. That we ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of GOD, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. That we should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavours, but that at last we should gain a habit, which will naturally produce its acts in us, without our care, and to our exceeding great delight.

That the whole substance of religion was faith, hope, and charity; by the practice of which we become united to the will of GOD: that all beside is indifferent and to be used as a means, that we may arrive at our end, and be swallowed up therein, by faith and charity. That all things are possible to him who believes, that they are less difficult to him who hopes, they are more easy to him who loves, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.

That the end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshippers of GOD we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity. That when we enter upon the spiritual we should consider, and examine to the bottom, what we are. And then we should find ourselves worthy of all contempt, and such as do not deserve the name of Christians, subject to all kinds of misery, and numberless accidents, which trouble us, and cause perpetual vicissitudes in our health, in our humours, in our internal and external dispositions: in fine, persons whom GOD would humble by many pains and labours, as well within as without.

After this, we should not wonder that troubles, temptations, oppositions and contradictions, happen to us from men. We ought, on the contrary, to submit ourselves to them, and bear them as long as GOD pleases, as things highly advantageous to us. That the greater perfection a soul aspires after, the more dependent it is upon Divine grace. Being questioned by one of his own society (to whom he was obliged to open himself) by what means he had attained such an habitual sense of GOD? he told him that, since his first coming to the monastery, he had considered GOD as the end of all his thoughts and desires, as the mark to which they should tend, and in which they should terminate.

That in the beginning of his novitiate he spent the hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of GOD, so as to convince his mind of, and to impress deeply upon his heart, the Divine existence, rather by devout sentiments, and submission to the lights of faith, than by studied reasonings and elaborate meditations.

That by this short and sure method, he exercised himself in the knowledge and love of GOD, resolving to use his utmost endeavour to live in a continual sense of His Presence, and, if possible, never to forget Him more.

That when he had thus in prayer filled his mind with great sentiments of that infinite Being, he went to his work appointed in the kitchen (for he was cook to the society); there having first considered severally the things his office required, and when and how each thing was to be done, he spent all the intervals of his time, as well before as after his work, in prayer. That, when he began his business, he said to GOD, with a filial trust in Him, "O my GOD, since Thou art with me, and I must now, in obedience to Thy commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech Thee to grant me the grace to continue in Thy Presence; and to this end do Thou prosper me with Thy assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections."

As he proceeded in his work, he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering to Him all his actions. When he had finished, he examined himself how he had discharged his duty; if he found well, he returned thanks to GOD; if otherwise, he asked pardon; and without being discouraged, he set his mind right again, and continued his exercise of the presence of GOD, as if he had never deviated from it. "Thus," said he, "by rising after my falls, and by frequently renewed acts of faith and love, I am come to a state, wherein it would be as difficult for me not to think of GOD, as it was at first to accustom myself to it."

As Bro. Lawrence had found such an advantage in walking in the presence of GOD, it was natural for him to recommend it earnestly to others; but his example was a stronger inducement than any arguments he could propose. His very countenance was edifying; such a sweet and calm devotion appearing in it, as could not but affect the beholders. And it was observed, that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen, he still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even uninterrupted composure and tranquillity of spirit.

"The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess GOD in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/brother-lawrence/fourth-conversation/>

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