

Spiritual Maxims

by Madame Guyon

Great perfection is achieved by surrendering everything to God and living in abandonment to His will.

Scripture: Psalm 37:5, Isaiah 28:9, Matthew 16:24, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:3, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Madame Guyon preaches on the spiritual journey towards perfection, emphasizing the importance of complete surrender to God and the challenges faced in bearing with others, oneself, and ultimately with God. She highlights the significance of humility, selflessness, and the union with God that comes through faith and the cross. Guyon encourages a deep abandonment of self, a pure love for God, and a continuous sacrifice of all gifts and talents to glorify Him.

Transcript

"Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts."--Isa. xxviii. 9.

SPIRITUAL MAXIMS.

1. To rob God of nothing; to refuse Him nothing; to require of Him nothing; this is great perfection.[11] 2. In the commencement of the spiritual life, our hardest task is to bear with our neighbor; in its progress, with ourselves, and in its end, with God. 3. He that regards self only with horror, is beginning to be the delight of God. 4. The more we learn what humility is, the less we discover of it in ourselves. 5. When we suffer aridity and desolation with equanimity, we testify our love to God; but when He visits us with the sweetness of his presence, He testifies his love to us. 6.

He that bears the privations of the gifts of God and the esteem of men, with an even soul, knows how to enjoy his Supreme Good beyond all time and above all means. 7. Let no one ask a stronger mark of an excellent love to God, than that we are insensible to our own reputation. 8. Would you exert all your powers to attain Divine Union? Use all your strength for the destruction of self. 9. Be so much the enemy of self as you desire to be the friend of God. 10. How are we directed in the law to love ourselves?

In God with the same love that we bear to God; because as our true selves are in Him, our love must be there also. 11. It is a rare gift to discover an indescribable something, which is above grace and nature;

which is not God, but which suffers no intermediate between God and us. It is a pure and unmixed emanation of a created being who is immediately connected with the Uncreated Original, from whom he proceeds. It is a union of essence with essence, in which nothing that is neither can act the part of an intermediate. 12.

The ray of the creature is derived from the Sun of the Divinity; it cannot, however, be separated from it; and if its dependence upon its divine principle is essential, its union is not less so. O wonder! The creature which can only be by the power of God, cannot exist without Him, and the root of its being, that nothing can come between or cause the slightest separation. This is the common condition of all creatures; but it is only perceived by those whose purified faculties can trace the grandeur of their centre, and whose interior, freed from the defilement that covered it, begins to return to its origin. 13.

Faith and the cross are inseparable: the cross is the shrine of faith, and faith is the light of the cross. 14. It is only by the death of self that the soul can enter into Divine Truth, and understand in part what is the light that shineth in darkness. 15. The more the darkness of self-knowledge deepens about us, the more does the divine truth shine in the midst. 16. Nothing less than a divine operation can empty us of the creature and of self, for whatever is natural tends constantly to fill us with the creature, and occupy us with ourselves.

This emptiness without anything distinct, is, then, an excellent sign, though it exist surrounded by the deepest and, I may say, the most importunate temptations. 17. God causes us to promise in time of peace what He exacts from us in time of war; He enables us to make our abandonments in joy, but He requires the fulfilment of them in the midst of much bitterness. It is well for thee, O Love! to exercise thy rights; suffer as we may, we will not return to self, or if we suffer because we have done so, the remedy for the evil is to devote ourselves afresh with an enlarged abandonment.

Strange malady, the cure of which is only to be found in a worse! O Lord, cause me to do whatever Thou wilt, provided I do only thy will?[12] 18. How hidden is the theology of Love! O Love, Thou sulliest to excess what Thou wouldst raise to the heights of purity! Thou profanest thine own sanctuary; there is not left one stone upon another that is not cast into the dirt. And what shall be the end? Thou knowest it from the beginning; it is worthy of so great a Workman that his work should be hidden, and that while He seems to destroy, He should accomplish it the most effectually. 19.

Ah Lord! who seest the secrets of the heart, Thou knowest if I yet expect anything from myself, or if there be anything which I would refuse to Thee! 20. How rare is it to behold a soul in an absolute abandonment of selfish interests, that it may devote itself to the interests of God! 21. The creature would willingly cease to be creature if it could become God; but where shall we find one willing that God should resume everything He has bestowed without receiving anything in return?

I say everything, and everything without reserve, even to our own righteousness, which is dearer to man than his existence, and to our rest, by which we enjoy self and the gifts of God in self, and in which we place our happiness, without knowing it. Where shall we find an abandonment that is as comprehensive as the will of God, not only when accompanied by delights, illumination, and feeling, but under all circumstances and in fact? O it is a fruit of Paradise that can scarce be found upon the earth! 22.

God is infinitely more honored by the sacrifices of death than by those of life; by the latter we honor Him as a great Sovereign, but by the former, as God, losing all things for his glory. This is the reason why Jesus Christ made many more sacrifices of death than of life; and I suspect no one will gain all without having

lost all. 23. Reason should not undertake to comprehend the last destructions; they are ordained expressly to destroy our reason. 24. God has means more efficient, more conducive to his own glory, and more edifying for souls, but they are less sanctifying.

These great and dazzling gifts are very gratifying to nature, even when it seems to give way beneath their weight, and thus nourish its secret life; but distresses, continual dyings, and unprofitableness for any good, crucify the most vital parts of the soul, which are those which prevent the coming of the kingdom of God. 25. In our solemn feasts, some strive to do something for Thee, O my God! and others, that Thou mayest do something for them; but neither of these is permitted to us.

Love forbids the one and cannot suffer the other. 26. It is harder to die to our virtues than to our vices; but the one is just as necessary as the other for perfect union. Our attachments are the stronger as they are more spiritual. 27. What is a help to perfection at one time, is a hinderance at another; what formerly helped you in your way to God, will now prevent your reaching Him; the more wants we have, the further we are from God, and the nearer we approach him, the better can we dispense with everything that is not Himself.

When we have come there, we use everything indifferently, and have no more need but of Him. 28. Who can say to what extent the divine abandonment will carry the poor soul that is given up to it? or rather, to whom can we describe the extremity of sacrifice which God exacts from his simple victim? He raises him by degrees, and then plunges him into the abyss; he discovers new points to him day by day, and never ceases until he has sacrificed everything God wills, putting no other bounds to his abandonment than God does to his decrees.

He even goes further, submitting to everything that God could do, or his sovereign will ordain. Then every selfish interest is given up; all is surrendered to the Author of All, and God reigns supreme over his nothingness. 29. God gives us gifts, graces, and natural talents, not for our own use, but that we may render them to Him. He takes pleasure in giving and in taking them away, or in so disposing of us, that we cannot enjoy them; but their grand use is to be offered in a continual sacrifice to Him; and by this He is most glorified. 30.

Naked faith keeps us in ignorance, uncertainty, and oblivion of everything in reference to ourselves; says everything, excepts nothing, neither grace nor nature, virtue nor vice; it is the darkness concealing us wholly from ourselves, but revealing so much the more of the Divinity and the greatness of his works; an obscurity that gives us an admirable discernment of spirits, and dislodges the esteem and love of self from its most secret recesses. Pure love reigns underneath, notwithstanding; for how can a soul go about to consider its own interest, when it cannot so much as look at itself?

Or, how could it be pleased to look at what it cannot see? It either sees nothing, or nothing but God, who is All and in all, and the more it is blinded to self, the more it beholds of Him. 31. There are but few men who are led by their reason, most of them are fewer, indeed, who act from an illuminated faith, or from reason enlightened by faith; but shall we find a single one who admits no guide but a blind faith, which, though it leads him straight to God by the short road of abandonment, seems, nevertheless, to precipitate him into abysses from which he has no hope of ever escaping?

There are, however, some such souls, who have noble trust enough to be blindfolded, and led they know not whither. Many are called, but few are willing to enter, and they who have most fully surrendered themselves to the sway of their senses, their passions, their reason, and the distinct illuminations of faith,

are they who have the greatest difficulty in plunging into the gulf of the blindest and most naked faith; whereas the simple souls enter with ease. It is the same as with the shipwrecked; those who know how to swim, or who have perhaps seized a plank of the ship, struggle and contend for a long while before they drown; but those who cannot swim, and who have nothing to sustain them, are instantly submerged, and, sinking without a struggle beneath the surface, die and are delivered from their suffering. 32.

The spirituality of most spiritual persons is nothing but presumption. When the Divine Truth penetrates to their centre, it discovers many a theft from God in their course, and teaches them that the only way to secure themselves is by an abandonment without reserve to God, and submission to his guidance; for, whenever we endeavor to bring about our own perfection, or that of others, by our own efforts, the result is simply imperfection. 33. The soul that is destined to have no other support but God himself, must pass through the strangest trials.

How much agony and how many deaths must it suffer before losing the life of self! It will encounter no purgatory in the other world, but it will feel a terrible hell in this; a hell not only of pain--that would be a small matter--but also of temptations its own resistance to which it does not perceive; this is the cross of crosses, of all sufferings the most intolerable, of all deaths the most despairing. 34. All consolation that does not come from God is but desolation; when the soul has learned to receive no comfort but in God only, it has passed beyond the reach of desolation. 35.

By the alternations of interior union and desertion, God sometimes makes us feel what He is, and sometimes gives us to perceive what we are. He does the latter to make us hate and die to ourselves, but the former to make us love Him, and to exalt us into union. 36. It is in vain for man to endeavor to instruct man in those things which the Holy Spirit alone can teach. 37. To take and receive all things not in ourselves, but in God, is the true and excellent way of dying to ourselves and living only to God.

They who understand the practice of this, are beginning to live purely; but, outside of this, nature is always mingled with grace, and we rest in self instead of permitting ourselves no repose, except in the Supreme Good, who should be the center of every movement of the heart, as He is the final end of all the measures of love. 38. Why should we complain that we have been stripped of the divine virtues, if we had not hidden them away as our own? Why should we complain of a loss, if we had no property in the thing lost? or why does deprivation give us so much pain, except because of the appropriation we had made of that which was taken away? 39.

When thou canst not find thyself, nor any good, then rejoice that all things are rendered unto God. 40. O monster justly abhorred of God and man! after being humiliated in so many ways, I cannot become humble, and I am so pampered with pride, that when I most endeavor to be humble, I set about my own praises! 41. Some saints have been sanctified by the easy and determined practice of all the virtues, but there are others who owe their sanctification to having endured with perfect resignation the privation of every virtue. 42.

If we do not go so far as to be stopped by nothing short of the power of God, we are not entirely free from presumption; and if our abandonment is bounded by anything short of the possible will of God, we are not yet disengaged from appropriation; and presumption and appropriation are impurities. 43. I have never found any who prayed so well as those who had never been taught how. They who have no master in man, have one in the Holy Spirit. 44. He who has a pure heart will never cease to pray; and he who will be constant in prayer, shall know what it is to have a pure heart. 45.

God is so great and so independent, that He can find means to glorify Himself even by sin. 46. While our abandonment blesses or spares us, we shall find many to advise it; but let it bring us into trouble, and the most spiritually-minded will exclaim against it. 47. It is easy enough to understand the course of such as go on from virtue to virtue, but who can comprehend the decrees that send some dashing from one precipice to another, and from abyss to abyss? or who shall bring aid and comfort to these hidden favorites of God, whom He gradually deprives of every stay, and who are reduced to an inability to know or help themselves as utter as their ignorance of what sustains them? 48.

Who can comprehend the extent of that supreme homage which is due to the will of God? 49. Those who are abandoned are cast from one precipice to another, and from one abyss to another, as if they were lost. 50. The harmlessness of the dove consists in not judging another; the wisdom of the serpent in distrusting ourselves. 51. Self-seeking is the gate by which a soul departs from peace; and total abandonment to the will of God, that by which it returns. 52. Alas! how hard it is to will only the will of God, and yet to believe that we do nothing but what is contrary to that will! to desire nothing so much as to do His will, and not even to know what it is! to be able to show it with great confidence to others, but not to find it for ourselves!

When we are full of His will, and everywhere penetrated by it, we no longer know it. This is, indeed, a long and painful martyrdom, but one which will result in an unchangeable peace in this life, and an incomprehensible felicity in the next! 53. He who has learned to seek nothing but the will of God, shall always find what he seeks. 54. Which is the harder lot for a soul that has known and loved God, not to know whether it loves God, or whether God loves it? 55. Which of the two would the perfect soul choose, if the choice were presented, to love God, or to be loved by Him? 56.

Tell me, what is that which is neither separated from God nor united to God, but which is inseparable from Him? 57. What is the state of a soul which has neither power nor will? and what can it do, and not do? 58. Who shall measure the extent of the abandonment of a soul that is no longer self-possessed in anything, and which has an absorbing sense of the supremacy of the power and will of God? 59. Who can take in the extent of the interior sacrifices of Jesus Christ, except him to whom He shall manifest them? 60.

How can they be delivered from the life of self, who are not willing to abandon all their possessions? How can they believe themselves despoiled of all, who possess the greatest treasure under heaven? Do not oblige me to name it, but judge, if you are enlightened; there is one of them which is less than the other, which is lost before it, but which those who must lose everything have the greatest trouble in parting with.

THE END.

[11] To appropriate nothing to ourselves, either of God's grace or glory, but to refer it all to Him; to yield up everything to Him with a cheerful and delighted heart the moment He asks for it; and to be so absolutely content with his will, as to be able to confine our petitions to the simple prayer, "thy will be done," which, in truth, contains all prayer--this is, indeed, great perfection!--Editor.

[12] A proviso which the truly abandoned soul will not find necessary, or rest easy under.--Editor.

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