

How to Make Living in God's Presence a Habit

Your way to God begins on the day of your conversion, for conversion marks your soul's initial return to God. From that moment you begin to live and have your being by the means of His grace.

After your conversion, your own spirit—the human spirit (which is deep within your inmost being)—is touched by God and is made alive and functioning. Your spirit—in turn—invites your soul to compose itself and to turn within, there to find the God who has newly come to reside at the center of your being.

Your spirit instructs your soul that, since God is more present deep within you, He cannot be found anywhere else. Henceforth, He must be sought within. And He must be enjoyed there, alone.

Therefore, from the very beginning, you find great joy in knowing that your Lord is within you and that you can find Him and enjoy Him in your inmost being. From the very beginning of your conversion, from the very outset of your life in Christ, it is possible for you to know that what you are to pursue is that inward life.

What is conversion? It is nothing more than turning from your created nature and turning to God, who now resides at the center of your being.

Your conversion is not just a matter of turning from sin. Turning from sin to grace is certainly essential in salvation, but it is not all that salvation involves. To be complete, conversion must involve not only a turning from outward things but also a turning to the inmost portions of your being—to that place where the Lord has come to reside.

When you are turned toward God, you will find it easy to return there again and again. The longer you continue to turn inward to God, the nearer you are drawn to Him and the more firmly you adhere to Him. Consequently, you are further removed from your more outward and natural man—so often contrary to God.

By moving into that inmost sanctuary again and again, you will finally become so established in your conversion that it becomes natural, even habitual, to live in the presence of God. And where is God's presence? God's presence is where He lodges ... deep in your spirit.

Now do not suppose that such a state is reached by exertion or by effort on your part. The only thing you yourself are capable of doing is this: to withdraw from external objects. In other words, the most you can do is turn inward.

Yes, you are capable of cooperating with divine grace to that extent; therefore, you should attempt to do so. Beyond that, nothing. You have only to continue to be firm in adhering to the God who is within you.

Your Lord has a virtue of magnetic attraction. He draws you more and more powerfully to Himself. As He attracts you inwardly, He purifies you of all the things that are not of Himself.

But remember, this is His activity, not yours. Just as it is with impure vapor, so it is with you. Vapor is drawn up by the sun, and as it gradually ascends, it is rarified and made pure. The vapor's only contribution to this process is to remain passive and rise.

In our experience, there is a slight difference from that of the vapor. You and I have the privilege of cooperating voluntarily with the Lord's drawing of us toward Him. This inward turning to Him is very easy, natural and effortless because He is at your center. You turn because He draws you.

It is obvious, then, that you should give all your attention toward turning inward to the place of your Lord's residence. Do not be discouraged by the fact that you might find this a difficult exercise in the beginning.

Before very long, an abundant grace will come to you and this matter will become easy. That will be true if you are faithful to meekly withdraw your heart from outward distractions and occupations and then return to your center with affections full of tenderness and great serenity.

When your emotions and feelings are turbulent with anxiety and anger, be assured that a general retreat inward to the presence of God deadens these turbulent emotions. If you try any other way of opposing these emotions and feelings, you will succeed only in irritating them—not stilling them.

Knowing that, your purpose is to pursue the inward life. This is the spring of all the joy of the soul. This is the solid foundation of all spiritual progress. Your purpose is to pursue the life that dwells deep within your inmost center.

The Higher Way

But beware: Those who turn toward God merely by their intelligence may enjoy some spiritual contemplation, but they will never enter into an intimate union with God unless they quit their way and enter into the higher way of the inward touch. All working is in the spirit.

Those believers who are led by a Lord who is deep within their spirits are conducted by a blind abandonment and not by intelligence. They do experience a certain kind of knowledge, but it is a knowledge that is delightful and fruitful.

Such a believer never walks by his intellect. He is led in the inward way. He is destined to pursue blindly an unknown course which, though it seems perfectly natural to him, requires him to sense his way along by the intuitive life that dwells deep

within him and draws him forward.

In spite of the seeming uncertainty of his way, this simple and trusting believer makes progress in the Spirit with far more certainty than the intellectual believer! As contradictory as it seems, intellectual illuminations are subject to misleadings; yes, far more severe than those of the inward way.

The believer who is abandoned into that unknown course is being guided by a supreme will that conducts him wherever God desires. This believer follows a path prescribed for him by a touch of God from deep within his spirit. He is pursuing a way of faith and absolute abandonment and has neither liberty nor desire for any other path.

You might ask: If a person is urged on by no strong guidance, but walks blindly, is such a person really a follower of God? My answer is yes. That person does God's will even more truly than the one filled with sight.

He may not have the satisfaction of knowing he is doing the will of God; nonetheless, the Lord's will is engraved in indelible letters on that believer's innermost parts. He goes steadily under the influence of God's touch and the influence of his spirit; he progresses from one degree to another by faith.

True, it is a faith that is manifested more at some times than it is at other times, for he alternates between a sense of dryness and a sense of the presence of God. Nonetheless, his enjoyment of the Lord becomes continually deeper.

Paradoxically, as the enjoyment of the Lord deepens, it also becomes less perceptible. As his enjoyment of the Lord becomes less perceptible, his sense of the Lord becomes more inward, more delicate than ever before.

For a Christian such as this, even in the midst of dryness he

is delighted. His delight is not coming by distinct or intellectual illumination, though. His soul is not aware of the light he is receiving, but it receives all the benefits of that light!

The believer finds himself more acquainted with the truth that is implanted in his inmost being. This acquaintance causes everything in him to yield to the will of God.

As a result, God's will gradually grows more familiar to him. Eventually, he is more able, in a perceptible way, to penetrate a thousand mysteries—mysteries that he never could have discovered by light of reason or knowledge! He is gradually preparing, without being aware of it, for even greater levels of progress that lie out there before him.

Read a companion devotional.

Madame Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) was a French mystic who became well-known during the 17th century. She was a proponent of Quietism, which placed less emphasis on religious discipline than on total surrender to God. Guyon became embroiled in a controversy between the two most famous clergymen in France's history—Fenelon, whose spiritual life she greatly influenced—and Bossuet. This controversy over her teachings led to her disgrace and imprisonment. Nevertheless, her writings have influenced many religious groups through the centuries, including the Methodists and the Quakers, and they continue to impact those who desire a deeper relationship with God.

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