

THE  
PRACTICE  
OF THE  
PRESENCE  
OF GOD

Experience the Spiritual Classic through  
40 Days of Daily Devotion

BROTHER LAWRENCE  
WITH HAROLD MYRA



Discovery House®  
from Our Daily Bread Ministries

*The Practice of the Presence of God: Experience the Spiritual Classic through 40 Days of Devotion*

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DAY 1  
with BROTHER LAWRENCE

# A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE?

Something about Brother Lawrence kept drawing his interviewer back for more visits, just as millions have repeatedly returned to the pages of his little book. The simplicity and joy of the man is still contagious, centuries after his death. One suspects the visitor saw a twinkle in Lawrence's eye when he said he was disappointed that God hadn't punished him for his clumsiness and mistakes, giving him instead nothing but contentment.

The lowly brother didn't take himself too seriously, but he took God very seriously.

The marvelous thing is that his taking God so seriously didn't result in discouragement or gloom. He knew he fell far short of God's holiness, yet he rejoiced in his redemption—and he was reassured of that redemption by God's loving presence.

Some who take God seriously get overwhelmed by their failures. Brother Lawrence would simply admit his sins, repent, and move on, his mind saturated with God's love and glory.

Jesus said he came that we might have joy. The lowly brother was a living example that divine joy could actually be experienced here on earth.

How did this happen? Where did Brother Lawrence's joy and love for God come from?

One winter day when he was just eighteen, the course of his life was set as he noticed a tree stripped of its leaves. He later told friends that the Lord in those moments granted him extraordinary grace—instead of thinking about the bleakness of the branches, he envisioned the promise of new leaves to come and the hope of flowers and fruit.

This led to a high view of God’s providence and power.

His new perspective of the Lord’s greatness drew Brother Lawrence from the cold realities of the world to a deep love for God. For the rest of his long life, he was kept in God’s love, and he was full of hope in God’s promises.

How can *we* continually renew our hope and our sense of God’s presence? Brother Lawrence advises us to feed our souls with a lofty conception of God. He reveled in the biblical vision of the magnificence of the God of creation.

And what a magnificent creation it is! We’re now privileged to see its wonders in ways undreamed of by previous generations. A drive through a national park, a visit to an aquarium, or a click on “animal images” or “galaxies” reveals beauty, wild diversity, and mystery.

In a simpler time, Brother Lawrence saw in nature God’s handiwork, and he marveled at the Creator’s love for him. Determined to live in God’s presence, Brother Lawrence kept willing himself to turn his thoughts back to God—praising him for his wonderful works.

And we are invited to follow his lead.



## What Inspired Brother Lawrence

PSALM 34:8: Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!

ISAIAH 25:1: O LORD, I will honor and praise your name,  
for you are my God. You do such wonderful things!

MARK 12:30: [Jesus said,] “Love the LORD your God  
with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all  
your strength.”



## **The Brother's Reminder**

*“Nourish your soul with high notions of God.  
He is infinitely good and knows what we need.  
Do everything for the love of God.  
Derive great joy in being his.”*

## DAY 2

with BROTHER LAWRENCE

# THE STRAW ON THE GROUND

Brother Lawrence gave a simple illustration of what he meant by “doing everything for the love of God.” He said he was happy to pick up a straw from the ground, seeking God alone and nothing else—not even his gifts.

Although he enjoyed the things he received from God, Brother Lawrence explained that he always sought God himself. He received a steady flow of grace as a byproduct of his simply doing little things for the love of God.

His emphasis on seeking God and not only his gifts is in stark contrast to the main character of the old “Calvin and Hobbes” comic, which ran from 1985 to 1995. Some of the most hilarious and telling episodes are the Christmas strips in which Calvin chats to his stuffed tiger Hobbes about the presents he wants from Santa. The unregenerate, unrepentant Calvin wants lots and lots of gifts from Santa, but he’s torn because he knows he’s supposed to be good to get them. Calvin rationalizes and squirms and tries to figure out how he can con Santa, or at least appear to him that he’s a good little boy—which he almost never is.

Calvin really, really wants those gifts! And Santa? He’s the source of gifts, nothing more.

We smile at the little boy's antics. They highlight the distinction Brother Lawrence makes between seeking God and just seeking the benefits we may get from him.

Yet aren't we told that God is the giver of all good things? The first chapter of James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (v. 17 NKJV). Didn't Jesus say we have not because we ask not, and that his Father gives gifts to us when we ask?

It might be helpful to remember our own childhood Christmas celebrations and how we felt about those who gave us gifts. Hopefully, along with the excitement of opening presents, we also loved and appreciated the givers who loved us.

For Brother Lawrence, loving the Giver was his core satisfaction. He offers a clue as to how that worked for him when he says we should look beyond the gift and learn about God himself.

What did Brother Lawrence learn about God? That God loved him, sacrificed for him, wanted to be with him, and was always near him. He learned that God was worthy of praise.

Concentrating on the love and majesty and grace of God, Brother Lawrence could fully enjoy the gifts he received, because his heart beat in rhythm with that of his heavenly Father.



## **What Inspired Brother Lawrence**

PSALM 34:1-4: I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the LORD; let all who are helpless take heart. Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness; let us exalt his name together. I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears.



## The Brother's Reminder

*“Do everything for the love of God.  
Bring your faults to him, and accept his forgiveness.  
In unbroken communion, praise and worship him.  
Love God, and be happy in him.”*

# FIRST CONVERSATION

*Brother Lawrence's conversion and previous  
employment • His satisfaction in God's presence • Faith  
as our duty • Resignation as the fruit of watchfulness*

The first time I saw Brother Lawrence was August 3, 1666. He told me that God had done him a remarkable kindness in his conversion at age eighteen.

Brother Lawrence said that in the winter, when he saw a tree stripped of its leaves, he considered that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit would appear. By this realization he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since left his soul. This view perfectly set him loose from the world. And it kindled in him such a love for God that he could not tell whether his love had increased in the forty-plus years he had lived since.

He told me that he had been servant to a Monsieur Fieubert, and that he was a big, awkward fellow who broke everything. He had desired to enter a monastery, thinking that there he could atone for his clumsiness and the faults he should commit, and thereby sacrifice his life, with its pleasures, to God. But God had disappointed him, as Brother Lawrence had met with nothing but satisfaction in that place.

Brother Lawrence said that we should establish a sense of God's presence in ourselves, by continually conversing with him. It was a shameful thing to quit this conversation, Lawrence felt, to think instead of trifles and foolishness.

He believed that we should feed and nourish our souls with high notions of God. These would yield us great joy in our devotion to Him.

Brother Lawrence told me that we should quicken, that is to say, enliven our faith. He said it was lamentable that we had so little faith, and that instead of making faith the rule of their conduct, many people amused themselves with trivial religious exercises that changed daily. The way of faith, he said, was the spirit of the church, and it is sufficient to bring us to a high degree of perfection.

He said we ought to give ourselves up to God, with regard to things both temporal and spiritual, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of his will, whether he leads us by suffering or consolation. All would be equal to a truly resigned soul. Brother Lawrence said we must be faithful during those times of dryness, apathy, and boredom in prayer, all of which God uses to test our love to him; these are the times for us to make good and effective acts of resignation. Just one by itself would very much promote our spiritual advancement.

As for the miseries and sins that Brother Lawrence heard of daily in the world, he wondered little over them. On the contrary, he was surprised there were not more, considering the malice that sinners are capable of. For his part, he prayed for these people, but knowing that God could remedy their mischief at his pleasure, he gave them no further thought.

To arrive at such resignation as God requires, Brother Lawrence said we should carefully watch over our passions—those for spiritual things as well as those of a grosser nature. To people who truly desire to serve him, God will give light concerning those passions. If it was my design to sincerely serve God, Brother Lawrence said I could come to him as often as I pleased, without any fear of being troublesome. But if I was not sincere, I ought to visit Lawrence no more.

## SECOND CONVERSATION

*Love is the motive of all • Brother Lawrence once lived in fear, now he lives in joy • Diligence and love are necessary to receive divine assistance; simplicity is the key • Managing business abroad as he does at home • Specific times of prayer and acts of self-denial are not essential for the practice of the presence of God • Every little thing should be brought to God*

Brother Lawrence told me that he had always been governed by love, without selfish views. And having resolved to make the love of God the goal of all his actions, he was well satisfied with his method. He said he was pleased when he could pick up a straw from the ground out of love for God, seeking only him, and nothing else—not even his blessings.

Lawrence had long been troubled in his mind by the belief that he would be damned, and no one in the world could have persuaded him to the contrary. But he had reasoned with himself, thinking, “I only engaged in a religious life for the love of God, and I have endeavored to act only for him. Whatever becomes of me, whether I am lost or saved, I will always continue to act purely for the love of God—and I will know this, at least, that until death I will have done all that is in me to love him.” This troubled state of mind lasted four years, during which Brother Lawrence suffered much.

But since that time he had passed his life in perfect freedom and continual joy, having placed his sins between himself and God, as it were, to say that he did not deserve God’s favor. God, however, still continued to bestow it in abundance.

Brother Lawrence told me that to form a habit of conversing with God continually, referring all we do to him, we must at first pursue him with some diligence. But, after a little such effort, we would find his love stirring us to that pursuit so that it was not difficult at all.

He had expected, after all the pleasant days God had given him, that he would have his turn of pain and suffering. But Brother Lawrence was not uneasy about that, knowing very well that since he could do nothing by himself anyway, God would not fail to give him strength to bear the hardships.

When opportunities arose to practice some particular virtue, he addressed himself to God, saying, “Lord, I cannot do this unless you enable me.” Then he received more than sufficient strength.

If he ever failed in his duty, he only confessed his fault, saying to God, “I will never do otherwise if you leave me to myself. You must hinder my falling and correct what is amiss.” After this, he gave himself no further uneasiness about it.

Brother Lawrence told me that we ought to interact with God in the greatest simplicity—speaking to him frankly and plainly, imploring his assistance in our affairs just as they happen. God never failed to respond.

Lawrence said that he had once been sent into Burgundy, a journey of nearly two hundred miles, to buy wine for the society. This was a very unwelcome task, because he had no aptitude for business and because he was lame—he could only move around the boat by rolling himself over the casks. But he said that he gave himself no uneasiness about the journey, nor about the purchase of the wine, saying to God that it was *his* business. Afterward, Lawrence found it very well performed.

He had been sent into Auvergne the year before on the same business, and he could not tell exactly how the matter passed, but that it proved very well.

So it was with his business in the kitchen, to which by nature he had a great aversion. Having accustomed himself to doing everything there for the love of God, praying on all occasions for his grace to do the work well, Lawrence had found everything easy during the fifteen years that he was employed there.

He told me that he was very well pleased with the post he now held, but that he was just as ready to quit it as the former, since he was always pleasing himself, wherever he was, by doing little things for the love of God.

Brother Lawrence said that with him, set times of prayer were not different from other times. He would retire to pray, according to the direction of his superior, but he did not want or ask for such withdrawal, because his greatest business did not divert him from God.

Since he knew his obligation was to love God in all things, and since he endeavored to do so, he really had no need of someone to advise him on this. But he knew that he much needed someone to absolve him of his failings. He was very sensible of his faults, but not discouraged by them—he confessed them to God, and did not beg him to excuse them. After Lawrence had done this, he peaceably resumed his usual practice of love and adoration.

In his troubled state of mind, he had consulted nobody else. But knowing only by the light of faith that God was present, he contented himself with directing all his actions to God—that is, doing them with a desire to please him, come what may.

Lawrence told me that useless thoughts spoil everything. Mischief begins with them, and we ought to reject them as soon as we perceive their impertinence to the matter in hand—or our salvation—and return to our communion with God.

At the beginning of his religious life, he had often spent his appointed prayer time in rejecting wandering thoughts and falling back into them. He told me that he could never regulate his devotion by

the kinds of methods some use. Though at first he could meditate for some time, he would later wander off in a manner he could give no account of.

He said that self-inflicted discomforts and other exercises are useless, since they do not serve to arrive at union with God by love. He had well considered this, and found the shortest way to go straight to God was by a continual exercise of love, doing all things for his sake.

Brother Lawrence told me that we ought to discern the great difference between acts of the understanding and those of the will. The former are of comparatively little value, and the others all important.

Our only business, he said, is to love and delight ourselves in God.

No possible mortification, if devoid of the love of God, could efface a single sin. We should, without anxiety, expect the pardon of our sins from the blood of Jesus Christ, endeavoring only to love him with all our hearts. Brother Lawrence noted that God seemed to have granted the greatest favors to the greatest sinners, as clear evidence of his mercy.

The greatest pains or pleasures of this world are not to be compared with what Brother Lawrence had experienced of both kinds in a spiritual state. So he was anxious for nothing and feared nothing, desiring only one thing—that he might not offend God.

Brother Lawrence had no worry over small things. He said, “When I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, I am used to doing so—I shall never do otherwise, if I am left to myself. If I don’t fail, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that my success comes from him.”