

# CONVERSATIONS

## **Introduction:**

At the time of de Beaufort's interviews, Brother Lawrence was in his late fifties. Joseph de Beaufort later commented that the crippled brother, who was then in charge of the upkeep of over one hundred pairs of sandals, was "rough in appearance but gentle in grace".

## **First Conversation with Joseph de Beaufort:**

*5<sup>th</sup> August 1666*

God released such glorious grace into my life when He called me to conversion when I was eighteen.

In that winter, I noticed a tree without its leaves. I knew that before long new leaves would emerge and flowers and fruit would follow. From this meditation, I saw how great was the Provision and Power of God. I have never forgotten that picture; God spoke to me through it with such depth about Himself. This set me free from the world's trappings. It started a fire in me of love for God. That was forty years ago

now, and I'm not sure but I think, if anything, that love for Him has grown stronger over the years.

I used to be a footman to M. Fieubert, the treasurer, but I was not a very good one. I was clumsy and seemed break everything.

Finally, I decided to join a community in a monastery. I thought that I would be disciplined there for my clumsiness and all my other shortcomings. I would sacrifice my life with its pleasures to God.

But God disappointed and surprised me. I only experienced deep satisfaction in surrendering to Him like this.

I learned that a sense of the presence of God can become our normal life, if we continually talk with Him. It is shameful when we stop our conversations with Him, when we turn our attention to trivia or worse. We should nourish and feed our minds with worship of the Most High. From this comes great joy.

We should do everything to develop and activate our faith. It is not good that we have so little faith. Some people give themselves to devotions, a rule of life, religious rituals, and so on, which can become fads, instead of making faith in God their Rule, from which all their thoughts and actions can flow. Such is the true essence of the church. Such a faith, and faith alone, can bring us to a high level of spiritual maturity.

We should surrender ourselves to God in everything, whether we are engaged in the mundane things of this world or with spiritual activities. What we should seek is the satisfaction of only doing His will. We need to arrive at the place where we don't care whether we fulfil His will in us through suffering or through comfort; it's all the same to someone truly surrendered to Him.

Sometimes in prayer, God will test our love for Him. When we experience dryness and a lack of clarity that may bother us, we need to be faithful to Him. This will often help us mature in the Spirit.

Simply say, “Lord, I am yours. Dryness does not matter, nor does it move me!”

I’m not surprised at all the suffering and evil I hear about daily in the world. Actually, given what man is capable of, I’m surprised that there is not more of it in the world. My job is to pray for them. But I know my Redeemer can change any situation, so I do not agonise about such things.

So that we can be sure of this kind of surrender, we must examine carefully all our desires and motives. These motives can mix with our pursuit of Him as much as they can with our more carnal desires. God will reveal our true desires if we genuinely seek to serve Him.

If that is your true desire—sincerely to serve God—feel free to see me as often as you would like without worrying that you might become a nuisance to me. But if this is not the true desire of your heart, you do not need to visit me again.

## **Second Conversation:**

I have always been led by God without any ulterior motives. I made up my mind to make the love of God the end goal of everything I do. I am at peace with this one, simple motive. I am pleased what I can pick up a straw from the ground purely for the love of God. I seek Him and nothing else—even for He might give me or do for me.

For quite some time, I was distressed with the fear that I might be damned. Nobody in the world could have persuaded me otherwise. This soulful distress lasted four years, during which time I suffered a great deal.

Then, I thought to myself, "I have taken up this religious life only for the love of God. My aim has always and only to act for Him. Whatever happens to me—whether I am lost or saved—I am going to carry on only motivated in everything by the love of God. I will have achieved at least this much good: I will do my utmost to love God until I die." I came to realise that this anxiety comes from a lack of faith.

Since then, I have experienced a lifestyle of perfect freedom and continual joy. Even when I placed my sins between me and my Lord, telling Him that I didn't deserve His grace, He just continued to release His grace upon me generously, anyway!

In order to establish this habit of continually talking with God and bringing Him all we do, we must first surrender ourselves to Him diligently. It will not be long after doing this that we will find that His love for us excites us to encounter His presence without any effort on our part.

After the bliss of these days that God has given me, I will have my season of pain and suffering. This does not bother me at all. Since I know that I can do nothing of my own strength, God will not fail to give me all the strength I need to endure any suffering that comes my way.

Sometimes, when I have had the chance to develop my character, I have confessed to God, "Lord, unless you help me, I cannot do this." Then I receive more than enough strength.

When I fail, I merely confess my failures, saying to God, “I will never get out of this rut if you leave me to myself. You must stop me failing again. And it is You who must change what is wrong.” After I pray like this, I leave it with Him and put it behind me, not allowing it to bother me further.

In everything, we should behave towards God in the greatest simplicity. Speak to Him frankly and plainly. Ask for His help in your affairs just as they happen. God is faithful, never failing to help us, as has often been my testimony.

Recently, I was sent to Burgundy to replenish the stock of wine for our community. I really did not want to go because I am not very good at business and because I am lame; I would have to move about the boat by rolling myself over the casks. But I did not allow myself to become anxious about it, neither this physical challenge nor the business of buying wine. I told the Lord that this was His business, and after that it all went very well. The same thing happened to me the year before when I was sent to Auvergne.

It is the same for me in the kitchen, to which I have a strong natural aversion. Left to my own choices I would not be there. But I have learned to do everything there as an act of love towards God. Sometimes, as I pray, I discover His grace to do a good job and, in fact, I have found it easy during my fifteen years there.

I am very pleased with my current role, but I am ready to leave it as I was with my previous roles, because in whatever I do, I please myself by finding little things I can do for the love of God.

Yes, in this community I do have set times of prayer, but these are no different to me than at any other time of the day. Yes, I do withdraw to pray—as directed by my superior—but

I do not need to withdraw nor would I ask to do so, because I however busy I am, it does not distract me from God.

I know that I must love God in everything and as I seek to live this out, I don't need a director to counsel me. But I do need the absolution of a confessor. I know my faults only too well, but I do not let them discourage me. When I have confessed them to the Lord, in His peace I resume my lifestyle of loving and adoring Him.

When my soul is troubled, I do not ask anyone about it. But faith shows me that God is with me always. So I am happy to put everything before Him. Putting it another way, I diligently and passionately do all things to please the Lord, and let everything else unfold from there.

All other thoughts we may have are useless and pollute our singular devotion to our Lord. These thoughts are where the mischief begins. We must reject these kinds of thoughts as soon as we become aware of their irrelevance to our surrender and service to God. We must reject them and bring our attention back to our oneness with God.

When I first began appointed prayer times, I would often spend them simply rejecting my wandering thoughts and then find myself slipping straight back into them. For a while, I meditated, but later gave that up—I'm not sure how. I am at a loss to practice prayer and meditation in the ways some do.

All the physical and mental disciplines are utterly useless unless they can be made the means to love God and be in oneness with Him. I have thought about this a lot and I have come the conclusion that the most direct way to God is the shortest; to go directly to Him by making everything all the time an expression of love and by doing everything for His glory.

There is a big difference between doing something from our understanding and reason compared to doing something from our own will and obedience. Doing something according to our own reason is of comparatively little value. Doing something out of love and faith from the heart is priceless. Our only business is to love and delight ourselves in God.

Whatever trials, or sufferings, or self-mortifications we endure, if done without love then they cannot erase a single sin. Without being troubled for a moment by any doubt, we should only expect pardon for our sins through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; our only attention should be given to loving Him with all our hearts. God, if anything, seems to release even greater grace to the greatest sinners, which reveals His astonishing mercy.

I do not consider the greatest pains nor the greatest pleasures that come from this world worth comparing with what I have experienced—both pain and pleasure—in the spirit. So, I am carefree and fearless, wanting only one thing of God: that I will not offend Him.

I am clear of guilt. I have no reservations; for if I fail, I will be ready to admit it saying, “I am likely to do this; and I shall never be perfect in this if I am left to myself.” If I do not fail, then I give thanks to God, knowing that He is my strength in this.