



*Dan Nolta*

Over the years I have read books and then set them aside, unimpressed, only to pick them up years later and be stunned by what I read—very impressed. Such has been my experience this second time through the collection of Brother Lawrence's writings: *The Practice of the Presence of God with Spiritual Maxims*, as republished by Spire Press. (Each day's introductory quote comes from that publication.)

In these past six or eight months, I have read and reread portions of the book seeking a deeper understanding, not because his thoughts are complicated, rather that they are simple yet deeply profound.

As I read, I often said to myself, "That is so Friend-like," even though I understand that Brother Lawrence was a Roman Catholic, barefooted brother of the Carmelite order.

History knows him best (as do I) for his assigned work in the kitchen of the monastery:

"Lord of all pots and pans and things...  
Make me a saint by getting meals  
And washing up the plates!"

It causes my prayer to be: "Lord, make of me a saint, as Judi and I live out our lives among the saints at Friendsview Retirement Community."

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:9-18*

“We must know before we can love. In order to know God, we must often think of Him; and when we come to love Him, we shall also think of Him often, for our heart will be our treasure. This is an argument which well deserves your attention.”

In 1958 I was a “baby Christian,” of just two years. It was in that year that a musician by the name of Phil Spector, inspired by the words on his father’s tombstone, “To Know Him Is to Love Him,” wrote a secular song by that title. (It could easily be a hymn.) In our Scripture for today, John, sharing an exchange between Jesus and Philip, shines a light on the connection between *knowing* and *loving*.

Commentators remind me that when the Hebrew says, “I know him” they integrate *knowing about* with *actually experiencing* that person. In our modern age we might liken it to the difference between taking a virtual tour of a home for sale and physically being in that home. For sports fans in the Northwest, it’s the difference between watching the Seahawks on television and suiting up on game day.

Brother Lawrence challenges us to spend enough time in the presence of God to know more than just *about him*, but to experience him to the extent that we truly *know him*. To know someone well enough to truly love them takes time. So Brother Lawrence further challenges us to “think of him [God] often.” He challenged himself to be aware of God each and every moment, until he felt that God was truly central and supreme in his life. May you and I be equally aware of his presence.

*SONG: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I refuse to be content with knowing about you. Remove every hindrance to my awareness of your moment by moment presence, that I may truly know you.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 14:15-17*

“Thus I continued some years, applying my mind carefully the rest of the day, and even in the midst of my business, to the presence of God whom I considered always as with me, often as in me.”

Scripture speaks with more certainty than Brother Lawrence, who seems to have thought that God was sometimes *with* him and sometimes *in* him. Jesus announces to his disciples that God was at that moment living *with them* but there would come a day when he would actually be *in them*. I have no trouble thinking and writing, “I wish that I understood all of the implications of that promise.”

To have not just the essence (core nature), but the actual presence in the person of the Holy Spirit living within us is—in our modern vernacular—“mind-blowing” and difficult to get our head around.

Brother Lawrence struggled with the concept of God’s presence living in him—frankly, so do I. It changes each and every moment of each and every day because it means that God sees, hears, and feels my every act in the present moment. His moment by moment presence calls me to listen to him closely, and obey readily.

For me, I often find that *presence* sifts my motives, purifies them in short order, changes them, and then allows me to act in ways that help and not harm. That *presence* also chastises, convicts, and corrects when I fail to obey.

*SONG: Moment by Moment*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh God, make me, day by day and moment by moment, more sensitive and obedient to the presence of your Holy Spirit within me. I will yield to your correction as a child to parent.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:5-9*

“And I apply myself diligently to do nothing and think nothing which may displease Him. I hope that when I have done what I can, He will do with me what He pleases.”

We moderns might observe: “Why would that be something that Paul would emphasize?” They didn’t have movies, television, smart phones, or iPads. Why would they have any problems with impure thoughts or things not pleasing to God?”

Surely, their line of sight was not filled with the gross, obscene, violent, and crass that we find ourselves struggling with today. For us every flip of the screen holds the possibility of an image that will suddenly shove us off center and into a world of lust, anger, or greed—and we are convinced that it is the way of this age. But how could we live without such gadgets?

At the end of the day we know in our hearts that we are the ones who control the next flip of the screen or website before us. We control the content that fills our head and reaches down into our heart. While we would like to excuse ourselves and blame the device, deep down we know it is our choice. It is the battle in the heart that must be won if we are to please God.

*SONG: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, it is the call of the ancients, “Think about such things” that echoes in my heart today. I hear it in my heart and I validate it in my life. Purify my heart, lend me your wisdom, courage, and strength to obey.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:5-6*

“It is, however, necessary to put our whole trust in God, laying aside all other cares, and even some particular forms of devotion, though very good in themselves, these devotions are only means to attain to the end. So when by this exercise of the presence of God we are with him who is our end, it is then useless to return to the means.”

The words of Brother Lawrence dig into my soul and cause me to think. “Devotions are only means to attain an end.” I have often come to the end of my time of “reading through the Bible in a year” to find that I can scarcely remember what I have just read. I realize how rote “devotions” can be, how much an exercise for the sake of exercise. Yes, even the habitual reading of *Fruit of the Vine* can be rote as well. Brother Lawrence reminds us that what matters is the end product—our devotion, our complete trust in God.

Our *devotional* time is only the means to achieve *devotion*. If devotional time completed—another check mark on the calendar—is our desire, we can surely accomplish that. If true devotion is our desire, our devotions must be accompanied by and in close companionship with the Holy Spirit, stirring our spirit to respond to the will and direction of the Father.

Whether our devotional time is guided by the *Fruit of the Vine*, *Little Visits with God*, or “Read Through the Bible in a Year,” recognize today their completion is only the means to the end. Let true and real devotion to God be the end for which we strive.

*SONG: Draw Me Nearer (I Am Thine, O Lord)*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I desire to know you, to trust you, and to obediently follow you all the days of my life.*

—Dan Nolta

**BIBLE READING: Psalms 119:65-71**

“He often sends diseases of the body to cure those of the soul.... God often permits that we should suffer a little to purify our souls and oblige us to continue with Him.”

I believe a mature faith says, “God, I trust you no matter what comes.” But in all honesty I still struggle in my heart with the question: If he allows sickness, affliction, and pain, will I still say it? Brother Lawrence hits *me* right between the eyes with the statement: “God often permits that we should suffer a little to purify our souls.” He is telling us that God permits us to have pain and disease and then chooses to use our physical pain to get at our spiritual pain.

I note that human nature demonstrates and validates that process. Often it is only our physical illness that slows us down enough to divert our attention from our *busyness* to his *business* in our lives. In the course of illness, the scope of our life narrows and narrows until jobs, vacations, new cars, entertainment—nothing matters but our relationship with God. And isn’t that the goal of the Christian life, that God, and my relationship with him be supreme and override all else? What does it matter in the end if it costs everything? In the end everything else is gone anyway. As a saint of a generation ago said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” (Jim Elliot).

**SONG: Have Thine Own Way, Lord**

**PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, whatever comes,  
prosperity or adversity, I will trust you and allow you to use it  
for my growth and your good.**

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 28:5-9*

“The end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect of worshipers of God we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity.”

“They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.” That sentence from Matthew seems to be a perfect description of true worship. The context surrounding that verse is finding the risen Christ “just as he said.”

Those Jesus met and spoke with now know who he is, the Son of God “just as he said.” They now know that he died on the cross for their sins, “just as he said.” They now know that he had indeed risen from the dead, “just as he said.” It was all true and now they are confronted with the very one who is the Truth.

At his appearance they could have fled in fear or they could have questioned with scorn. They did neither. They fell and clasped his feet and worshiped. With the discovery of the Truth there is nothing else to do but worship.

Being among those who have discovered the truth about Jesus, accepting him as our Lord and our Savior, it is to be our practice day by day to worship him. It does not come easily for ones like us who have been used to worshiping at the altar of self, doing as we would for our own pleasure. We strive day by day to “worship in spirit and in truth.” So we practice worship, leaving another piece of ourselves behind, worshiping more perfectly, until that day when we shall meet him face to face, fall to the street of gold, clasp his feet, and worship him.

*SONG: When We All Get to Heaven*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may your Holy Spirit be my tutor and my coach as I practice my worship, perfecting it until there is nothing of me and all of you.*

—Dan Nolta

**BIBLE READING: 1 Timothy 1:15**

“My request of you my friends and family...give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for his great goodness toward me, which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favors He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him.”  
“Death follows us close; let us be well prepared for it; for we die but once and a miscarriage here is irretrievable.”

Words do not suffice to say how my heart and mind resonate with the words of Brother Lawrence. (Please read them again.) Those are the words of my testimony. How generous is God’s mercy and goodness toward me—and, I am sure toward you the reader. If there is a word for us today, it is this: His mercy and goodness are past and present; given then and given now.

I cannot but write from where I am: Death follows me close. Surely at seventy-six the time must be short. But, if you are only twenty-six or thirty-six, it yet applies, for we know not the number of our years. I remember twenty-five years ago so clearly. Those years have quickly passed and the next years will go even faster for me and for you. My friend, “let us be well prepared for it [death], for we die but once and a miscarriage here is irretrievable.” In our modern vernacular, “You only get one chance at it, no do-overs.”

**SONG: If We Never Meet Again**

**PRAYER SUGGESTION:** *My heavenly Father, I want you to know that I have no complaints. Since I came to you, you have been more than fair, more than good, more than generous. Everything you promised has been given and I thank you.*

—Dan Nolta