

The Practice of the Presence of God Group Study Guide

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The Practice of the Presence of God Study Guide

This document contains discussion questions and exercises to assist your group in studying “The Practice of the Presence of God” by Brother Lawrence.

Theme to watch for throughout the book: In Thy Presence is Fullness and Joy.

Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (NKJV)

Note to participant: You will likely gain more from the book if you read a small amount in one sitting. Read one conversation or letter, then reflect on what you read before proceeding to the next conversation or letter. (*The Scripture verse references in this guide are not in the book. I have added them to show how the points relate to God’s Word.*)

Note to leader: There’s an exercise associated with the Fourth Letter that requires you to bring an apple for each member of your group. The Self-Assessment Exercise is for each person’s personal reflection. Some participants may prefer not to discuss it.

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A Pilgrim's Prayer

- Do you agree that you can find God in any circumstance? Why or why not? (*Psa 139:7*)
- What occupies your thoughts during routine or menial tasks?
 - brushing your teeth
 - doing laundry
 - preparing a meal
 - shoveling snow, doing yard work
 - backing up data files on your computer
- How difficult would it be for you to plan what to ponder as you do a routine task rather than let your mind wander?

The Conversations

First Conversation

- Have you experienced times when God's providence became overwhelmingly evident to you? If so, offer to tell your group about it.
- Of the four things that Brother Lawrence says we ought to do, which is easiest and which is most difficult for you?
 1. Continually converse with God
 2. Feed your soul with high notions of God
 3. Enliven your faith
 4. Seek your satisfaction only by fulfilling His will

Exercise: Free-association - High Notions

Purpose

Practice feeding your soul with high notions of God.

Participant Instructions

step	action
1	When the session leader says, "begin," write as many words as you can that bring high notions of God to your mind. [Session leader says, "begin," gives participants 60 seconds then says, "stop."]
2	Take turns reading your list of words. What words were repeated on several lists?
3	Briefly discuss how those words stimulate high notions of God for you.

Second Conversation

- Brother Lawrence noted that after experiencing a period of pleasant days, he knew that he would get a turn at pain and suffering. Why didn't this prospect worry him?
- According to Brother Lawrence in what way should we speak to God?
- When Brother Lawrence failed at a duty, he confessed his faults to God and told God that without His firm guidance, he would continue to fail. How is this similar to or different from the way you respond to a failure?
- What does Brother Lawrence say is our "only business"?

Third Conversation

- What did Brother Lawrence describe as the worst thing that could happen to Him? What is the worst thing that could happen to you?
- Brother Lawrence gave a reason for the lack of "Christian progress" (spiritual development). What is that reason?

Fourth Conversation

- Of the following steps to a continual conversation with God, which do you find most difficult?
 1. Recognize God's presence.
 2. Beg Him to reveal His will to you.
 3. Beg Him to help you perform well the tasks that He assigns you.
 4. Before you do the tasks, offer them to Him.
 5. While doing the tasks, praise Him and love Him for His infinite goodness and perfection.
 6. Thank Him after you have completed the tasks.
- Brother Lawrence noted that the best method of going to God is to perform our daily tasks without any thought of pleasing men.
 - How difficult would it be to do this?
 - What are some Bible verses to support this thought?
- Discuss the following observation that Brother Lawrence made. What would it take for you to persevere in the practice of all three?

1-All things are possible to him who believes .
2-They are less difficult to him who hopes .
3-They are more easy to him who loves .

They are still more easy to him who **perseveres** in the **practice** of all three.

The Letters

First Letter

- What did Brother Lawrence seek? What are you seeking?
- What did he renounce? What types of things would make it difficult to renounce everything that is not God?
- Brother Lawrence began to live as if only he and God were in the world. Under what circumstances could you imagine being able to do that?

Second Letter

- Someone told Brother Lawrence that a spiritual life progressed through three major stages:

servile fear > hope of eternal life > pure love

These methods frustrated him and he determined to focus only on giving himself to God. Can you relate to the three stages or would you characterize your spiritual life in a different way?

- In his circumstance, Brother Lawrence had set hours of prayer. To him, they became only a continuation of his focus on God rather than the only time he conversed with God.
 - What are your set times for prayer?
 - Other than those times, when do you talk with God?
 - What prompts you to talk with God?
- Brother Lawrence imagined himself as a stone before a carver. How do you envision yourself before God? (**Rom 9:21**, **1Pet 2:4-5**)

Third Letter

- Based on this letter, does Brother Lawrence favor the length or the frequency of prayers? Do you agree with him? Why/why not? (**Eph 6:18**, **Col 4:2**)
- If you have a list of 20 things you want to lift up in prayer, how would it work for you to break them into smaller sets and pray each set at a different time? What could you do to make this work (electronic reminders, physical notes)?

Fourth Letter

- Brother Lawrence speaks of a person who is so accustomed to being in God's presence that he pities those who are content with perfunctory worship. He notes that being satisfied with so little hinders God from fully letting His grace flow through us. How much effort do you put into getting as close to God as possible?
- "Not to advance in the spiritual life is to go back." -Brother Lawrence
What do you do to continue to advance in the spiritual life?

Exercise: State of Your Relationship with God

Purpose

Emphasize the challenges of and importance of recognizing the state of your relationship with God.

Participant Instructions

step	action
1	<p>[Session leader reads instruction in this step, gives each person an apple, then says, "begin." Session leader gives participants 60 seconds then says, "stop."]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accept an apple from the session leader. This apple represents your relationship with God.• Get to know your apple. How does it look and feel? Embrace your apple. ☺
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place your apple in the container that the session leader provides. [Session leader collects all apples, mixes them, then places them randomly on a table.]• Find and retrieve your apple from the group of apples on the table. Be certain that you have the correct apple.
3	<p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How were you able to recognize your apple?• In what way did the time you spent getting to know your apple help you recognize your apple?• In the metaphor of the apple as your relationship with God, what can you do to be sure you are fully aware of your relationship with God?• What problems do you think you will encounter if you fail to recognize the state of your relationship with God?

Fifth Letter

- According to Brother Lawrence, to correctly practice the presence of God, your heart must be empty of everything except God. What are the difficulties we are likely to face in achieving such a state?
- When striving to have a continual conversation with God, what is the best motive for doing so (according to Brother Lawrence)? What would motivate you to seek a continual conversation with God?

Sixth Letter

- Specific actions that we take to draw closer to God (prayer, praise, fasting...) are the means to the end. Brother Lawrence notes that if you are already in a state of intimate conversation with God, it does not make sense to interrupt that state when an appointed time to perform a devotional activity has arrived. What can we do to be sure we are worshipping God and not making devotional tools into idols?
- Brother Lawrence mentions that it is sometimes helpful to deny ourselves little pleasures as a way to focus more on God. Discuss the types of little pleasures that are available to us that may sometimes divert our focus from God.

Seventh Letter

- Brother Lawrence lists several little remembrances that are acceptable to God:
 - Pray for His grace
 - Offer Him your suffering
 - Thank Him for the favors He has given you in the midst of your trouble
 - Console yourself in HimWhich of these is most natural for you? Which do you think could help you draw closer to God?
- It is better to act with love, humility, and general confidence in God than to restrict yourself to rules or particular forms of devotion (according to Brother Lawrence). Discuss the validity of that point of view. ([Mat 6:7](#))

Eighth Letter

- We are all prone to wandering thoughts when we pray. Brother Lawrence lists one remedy, what is it?
- What does Brother Lawrence say is often a cause for a wandering mind during prayer? How would you characterize your prayers?
 - Long and rambling
 - Short and to the point

Ninth Letter

- When you become frustrated with yourself, consider these words from Brother Lawrence, *“One does not become holy all at once.”* How do you usually react when you disappoint yourself and God? Is there a better way to react?
- Brother Lawrence believed that our only job in life is to please God. He also understood that there is no way to please God without His help. From your perspective, is Brother Lawrence’s line of reasoning sound? (**Rom 8:8**)
- Brother Lawrence reasoned that before we can love God, we must know God, and to know God we must think of God often.
think of God > know God > love God
Is thinking of God sufficient to know Him? What else could you do to get to know God?

Tenth Letter

- In what way is it possible to love a person too much? How can you know if you are loving a person too much? (**Deu 6:5, Luke 10:27**)
- What analogy does Brother Lawrence use for neglecting God? What can you do to avoid neglecting God?

Eleventh Letter

- Rather than pray that God would deliver his acquaintance from pain, what did Brother Lawrence pray? Would you consider praying this way for yourself or others? Why/why not?
- Discuss Brother Lawrence’s view that pain is a favor from God rather than simply a source of distress. What are the benefits of pain? (**Jas 1:2, Rom 8:17-18, 2Cor 1:5-7**)
- In your experience, has God been nearer to you in sickness or in health?

Twelfth Letter

- According to Brother Lawrence, what effect does physical suffering have on our souls? In what ways have you experienced that connection?
- What does Brother Lawrence recommend you do in the height of your suffering?
- What would have made Brother Lawrence the most wretched man alive? What would make you the most wretched person alive?

Thirteenth Letter

- What mindset can help you bear grief more easily?
- Discuss Brother Lawrence's view that it is sometimes appropriate to stop medical care.
- Some prayers are not natural to us, but please God. Discuss some of these types of prayers.
 - ***Mat 5:44***
 - ***2Cor 7:9***
 - ***1Pet 5:10***

Fourteenth Letter

- How did Brother Lawrence describe the times when he was near death? How did he pray? How do you pray when you are ill?
- What is Brother Lawrence's advice to those who are just beginning to build their relationship with God? What helps you persist in developing close communication with God?

Fifteenth Letter

- Why does it make sense to receive the bitter and sweet from God's hand with equal thankfulness?
 - ***Rom 8:28***
 - ***Eph 5:20***
 - ***1The 5.18***
- Brother Lawrence said the more you know God, the more you desire to know Him. Has that been your experience? Why do some people never stop wanting to know God more?
- Where is the best place to seek God? In what way do you agree or disagree with Brother Lawrence's view on this question?
 - ***1Cor 2:11-13***
 - ***Col 3:16***
 - ***1John 2:3-5***
 - ***1John 2:27***
 - ***1John 5:20***

The Maxims

1. Regard God in all you do, say, and undertake.
2. You are unworthy of the name of Christ and God will chasten you through afflictions.
3. Discipline is for your good.
4. Because the world, the flesh, and the devil assault your soul, your soul can do nothing without the Grace of God.

Necessary Practices for Attaining the Spiritual Life

1. Teach your soul to find joy in God's companionship.
 2. Rule your actions to be acts of communion with God.
 3. Do all things quietly, calmly, and lovingly focused on God.
 4. Pause throughout the day to worship God in the depth of your being.
 5. Believe that God is within your soul.
 6. Examine yourself to find which virtues you lack.
- Which practice would be easiest for you?
 - Which practice would be most difficult for you?

To Worship God in Spirit and Truth

1. Offer Him the worship that you owe Him from the depth of your soul.
 2. Acknowledge that God is:
 - Infinitely perfect
 - Worthy of infinite adoration
 - Infinitely removed from sin
 3. Confess that you live your life contrary to His will.
- As a group, pray to acknowledge who God is.

Three Degrees of the Soul with God

1. Your soul is united to God by grace.
2. Your soul is in temporary union while performing an action that unites you with God.
3. Your soul is filled with a humble, reverent, joyful love, not fully describable in words. God is beyond our understanding. The will can only come to know God through love.

The Presence of God

1. is a realization of God as present
2. is a peace of the soul
3. is a lifting up of the soul above earthly matters
4. is speaking to God heart-to-heart
5. is a burning of God's love in the soul
6. is an effortless joy beyond measure
7. is the life and nourishment of the soul

Means of Attaining the Presence of God

1. Guard against doing, saying, or thinking anything displeasing to God.
 2. Faithfully fix your gaze on God.
 3. Before and after each task, pause briefly to look to God.
 4. Fix your mind on God alone.
 5. Pursue the practice even when discouraged by slow progress.
 6. Guard against earthly pleasures that distract you.
- Which of the above would be easiest for you?
 - Which of the above would be most difficult for you?

Benefits of the Presence of God

1. Faith grows more alive and active.
 2. Your hope is strengthened.
 3. A concentrated zeal grows in your heart.
 4. Your soul comes to a deep knowledge of God.
- Which benefit is most appealing to you?
 - What sacrifices would you make to receive that benefit?

Exercise: Self-assessment

For each statement below, indicate a number from 1-10, where "1" means you strongly disagree and "10" means you strongly agree.

I talk to God multiple times every day.	disagree ----- agree 1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I enjoy private conversations with God.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I make changes to my habits and schedule to give myself more opportunities to connect with God.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I am a good steward of all that God has give me (time, talents, treasure).	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I say "no" in circumstances where I know I will be drawn away from God.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I think of God and am thankful for Him even while doing tedious tasks.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I don't let rules or tools become more important than my actual relationship with God.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I am thankful for both the bitter and sweet things that God gives me.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10
I pray prayers that I know please God.	1 -2 -3 -4 -5 -6 -7 -8 -9 -10

Things to Ponder:

- As you carefully consider your responses, which areas are you ready to address in your relationship with God?
- As you consider your responses overall, where in your life will you likely have the biggest struggle in your relationship with God?

Exercise: Personal Action Plan

Create a personal action plan to apply a lesson you learned from this book.

My Lesson to Apply:
My Accountability Partner: (Person who will ask about my consistency, encourage me, urge me to continue, and praise me for progress)

Specific Behaviors I Commit to Demonstrate as I Apply My Lesson

Behavior	Where	When