

The Practice of the Presence of Jesus



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*Daily Meditations on the
Nearness of Our Savior*

JONI EARECKSON TADA

with **JOHN SLOAN**

BOOKS BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

Joni

When God Weeps

Heaven

A Spectacle of Glory

Joni and Ken: An Untold Love Story

A Place of Healing

Beside Bethesda

Finding God in Hidden Places

Infinite Hope

Timeless Hymns for Family Worship

The Awesome Super Fantastic Forever Party

Songs of Suffering

31 Days Toward Intimacy with God

31 Days Toward Overcoming Adversity

31 Days Toward Passionate Faith

Glorious Intruder

Secret Strength

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of the
Presence of
Jesus*



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In many cases, the excerpts have been edited slightly for readability. Some changes include changing the point of view from third person or second person to first person, as well as replacing outdated words with their more modern counterparts.

Punctuation, italics, and capitalization have been retained from the original.

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FOR JOHN SLOAN

*Is there an editor who loves books as much
as you? Maybe. But surely, there's no editor
who loves their authors more than you.
And for that I am grateful to God.*



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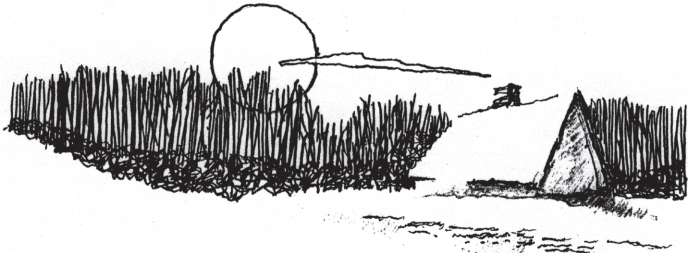
Introduction

About Brother Lawrence

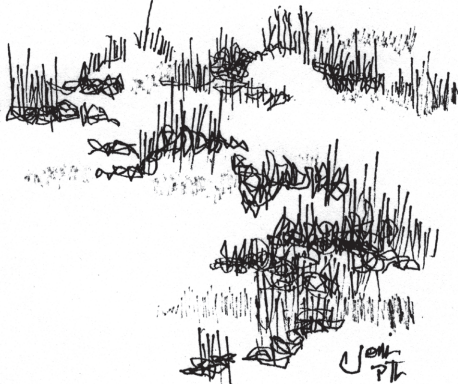
Brother Lawrence never intended for his letters to be read around the world. A monk who lived hundreds of years ago, he is best known today as the author of *The Practice of the Presence of God*. His book is small enough to fit in one hand and short enough to read in a day. But it has tremendous implications for anyone who picks it up. It became a phenomenal classic that has sold millions of copies in the last five decades. This little book of Lawrence's letters and conversations was not even credited to him initially; Lawrence never got to see his influence, but that would not have mattered to him.

Brother Lawrence was a monk, a soldier, a peasant servant, a mystic, and a man who sought God for many years. He was born Nicholas Herman to peasant parents in eastern France in 1608 or 1614 (the date of his birth is uncertain).

Europe's Thirty Years' War raged around Lawrence as he grew up. His childhood was marked by the conflict, and he entered military service young. His soldier's wages paid for a small amount of food daily. He was on the battlefield against the French, Germans, Swedes, and other nations in a horrific, pugilistic war. It was the brutality of personal combat in the war that bothered Lawrence, not the politics.



All the earth ... is at rest .
Zech. 1:11



He was also known for his bravery in that war. During one engagement, a party of German troops took him prisoner. They declared him a spy and treated him as such; they threatened to hang him. But he told them he wasn't frightened in the least, he wasn't who they stated he was, and therefore his conscience led him to look upon death indifferently. His honesty floored them, and the German officers let him go.

While a soldier, he had an experience that deepened his spiritual life. One winter, he saw a barren tree without leaves and fruit. He realized that he was like the barren tree—he would be transformed through God's power but only after a long season of very little fruit.

A blow ended Lawrence's service. He received a leg wound so grievous and deep that he no longer walked like a man untouched by war. He was set aside like an old piece of furniture, never to be used again. His injury later led to "sciatic gout" (known today as arthritis of the hip joint) and an ulcerated wound, which caused a distinct limp. He couldn't escape some feelings of bitterness, but in his later writings he asserted the providence and care of God in war. Even in the face of life-changing afflictions, Lawrence admonished others to hope: "Hope in Him more than ever: thank Him with me for the favours He does you, particularly for the fortitude and patience which He gives you in your afflictions: it is a plain mark of the care He takes of you; comfort yourself then with Him, and give thanks for all."

No longer able to serve as a soldier, he searched for another line of employment. He found work as a footman, opening carriage step-downs for the elite after their travels in the coach. Yet he proved incompetent at his job. Later he would claim that he broke everything he touched—the steps or pieces of a coach and presumably the livery of his coachman’s customers. It was another training ground for his later spirituality, but he would not linger there for long.

A broken soldier and hopeless footman, Lawrence decided to turn to a religious life. He joined the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Paris. Lawrence was unchanged by his seminary life for his first decade there. He performed his tasks—washing dishes, carrying pots and pans, lifting hot kettles of scalding water, or cooking meals in the deep pans he later scrubbed. He mopped and swept floors. He was still clumsy.

But it was there in the scullery that he found his secret: practicing the presence of God. He described the moment like this: “I was troubled sometimes with thoughts . . . that there was no salvation for me. When I thought of nothing but to end my days in these troubles. . . . I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which, till that time, was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace, as if she were in her centre and place of rest.”

Brother Lawrence realized that God was always with him, even during the most menial tasks. And just by acknowledging God’s presence, the most mundane jobs and the bleakest surroundings could be filled with God’s love and light.

Brother Lawrence devoted himself completely to practicing God's presence everywhere.

God blessed Lawrence in the kitchen and in the chapel, in times of pleasantness and in times of affliction, in whatever circumstances were brought his way. While others would rush to complete their duties, Brother Lawrence would do the same work, and more, but he was ever mindful that God was present. There was no need to rush away from the presence of God. Lawrence had conversations with God while he worked, and his simple life was replete with satisfaction. As he wrote, "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with GOD."

Through his awareness of his Father's presence beside him, Lawrence walked intimately with God through the remaining days of his life, each year becoming closer and closer to the One he served. Lawrence realized that even his mistakes were inroads to deeper communion with God: "I was very aware of my faults, but not discouraged by them. I confessed them to God and did not excuse myself. When I had done so, I peaceably resumed my usual practice of love and adoration." His lifelong pursuit of God was realized, and his practice of the presence of God was recorded in letters and conversations.

Brother Lawrence found a desire for God that eliminated all other passions: "Let all our employment be to *know* GOD: the more one *knows* Him, the more one desires to *know* Him." He conversed with God in as familiar a way as with

any other soul upon the earth. The monk humbly recommended his practice to others, knowing that the presence of God could be revealed to anyone who desired to know him better: “Were I a preacher, I should above all other things preach the practice of *the presence of GOD*; and, were I a director, I should advise all the world to it: so necessary do I think it, and so easy too.”

Lawrence discovered a secret that is simple and true, and yet takes a lifetime to put into practice. He found that in our own lives, we can live every day, every hour, and every moment in the presence of God. We can, like Lawrence, be in the middle of pots and pans, and yet be experiencing God’s presence. That’s what mattered the most to Lawrence—finding God in every present moment. He would want all of us to experience that grace.¹

About Joni Eareckson Tada

Joni Eareckson grew up in the era of new appliances, toasters, televisions, and two-car garages, where homes looked much the same on each block. In many 1950s’ post-war homes, church and Sunday school were routine for American families. Although conversations with her sisters and parents were laced with references to God and the Bible, Joni’s awareness of Jesus was more connected to his teachings than his nearness. The Bible enjoyed a prominent place in the living room but was revered from a distance.

The Earecksons' faithfulness was most evident in their daily singing. They knew countless Christian hymns and regularly sang together. It was not considered odd to break into a hymn while doing chores, yard work, sitting around the table after dessert, or heading up the stairs for bed. The words of hymns shaped Joni's early spiritual life:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.²

The name of Jesus remained familiar on the lips of Joni and her sisters.

The Eareckson family had roots extending back to the beginnings of the Reformed Episcopal Church, a small conservative and liturgical denomination. In the Eareckson household, the King James edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* stood opened; Joni learned many psalms by heart. She also learned the Collect for Purity, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, the General Thanksgiving, the Confession of Sin, and other prayers. She felt more comfortable with the rhythms of liturgy than the free-form services of most evangelical churches that her friends attended.

The last of four girls, Joni struggled to keep up with her active family who thought nothing of closing up the house for the summer to tent camp among the sand dunes of the Delaware shore. Joni would lie on the beach at night, har-

monizing with her sisters, who all knew countless gospel songs by heart. Under the stars she sensed another song, rhythmic like ocean waves, resonating with hints of God's immense presence far above her. She later described how she felt her first strong stirrings of the Spirit and a deep longing to know him better while beach camping—there had to be more to Jesus than what was lauded of God in songs and in her prayer book.

As a high school sophomore, fifteen-year-old Joni found herself captivated by the gospel presentation she heard at Young Life, an evangelistic outreach on her high school campus. Sitting cross-legged on the floors of local gathering spots like churches and homes, she sensed for the first time that Jesus—the Jesus her family had sung about, the Christ that her prayer book celebrated, the Almighty God who was the focus of Sunday services at her church—was, indeed, *personal*. Through Young Life, Joni became aware that Christ did not die for the general sins of everyone—he died for her. That awareness turned a key, and Joni apprehended her Savior personally. All the liturgy and hymns instantly gelled into a new understanding of Jesus's constant presence.

She immediately enrolled in confirmation classes at the Reformed Episcopal Church. Doctrines of heaven and hell, forgiveness, grace, justification, and sanctification took root quickly. Biblical precepts that once were vague became deeply familiar. She chose Galatians 2:20 as her life verse: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I

live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (ESV). She would know later what it meant to be “crucified with Christ.”

The late 1960s ushered in the sexual revolution, and Joni fell under its influence. During her remaining school years, she lapsed into moral failures that became habitual and dragged her downward into a deep spiritual depression. She longed to follow Christ, but with each sinful and irresponsible choice, she found herself enslaved. Joni wanted to repent but lost her ability to resist temptation. It crushed her to realize she had become a hypocrite—confessing Jesus in the light and denying him in the dark.

Weeks before her high school graduation, knowing that her lifestyle would only get worse on a college campus away from home, Joni prayed an ominous prayer. She boldly pleaded for God to do whatever—absolutely anything—to rescue her from her enslavement to lust. Shortly afterward, she broke her neck.

After her tragic accident, every Christian conviction she had was put to the test. And when the permanency of her paralysis finally hit her, Joni was filled with horror. Romans 8:28, with its assurance that God could work everything into a pattern for good, seemed almost trite as she faced life without use of her hands and legs. She reflected later, “This isn’t a boating accident; this is the sinking of the *Titanic*.” The hospital warehoused Joni on the geriatric ward of a state institution. Watching her friends head to college, land jobs out of state, or get married only increased her sense of

isolation. The ward felt like a prison. A numbing despair crept into her life, along with thoughts of suicide. She violently thrashed her head on her pillow, hoping to break her neck again and end her life.

Joni's older sister Jay saw her sibling spiraling downward. She opened the family farm to Joni. Even with the state institution behind her, Joni's depression lingered. She sat for hours staring out at the farm fields. Friends made phone calls; they weren't answered. Visitors arrived at the door; she stayed in bed. For weeks, Joni remained in a dark room with drapes pulled shut.

Eventually, Joni found the strength to pray, "God, if I can't die, please show me how to live." The next day she rallied, sat up in her wheelchair, and began moving forward into life. The *Book of Common Prayer*, with its Scripture-laced liturgy, was constantly on her lips. Joni began to thrive on the family farm. She found a smile.

Miss Eareckson refused to skate the surface of the questions that plagued her. Her friends—mostly college-aged Calvinists—created a circle of prayer for her. She took part in study sessions that lasted long into the night as friends munched pizza and mulled over difficult questions together. There was always plenty of music, feasting, and games, and there were even midnight hikes along the river that bordered the farm. The gatherings were an epiphany. These personal relationships gave shape to what Christian love should look and feel like.

Books were placed on a music stand, and Joni was able

to flip the pages using a mouth stick. She studied Dr. Lorraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, a lengthy work that helped her understand the expansive extent of God's sovereignty over all afflictions. She was astounded to learn that the reach of God's dominion covered even the granules of shifting sand below the very waters in which she broke her neck. Far from off-putting, she found the doctrine of God's sovereignty comforting.

She found a friend in Jonathan Edwards and his small book *Heaven: A World of Love*. Through its pages, she learned the connection between a Christian's response to suffering and that suffering's impact for eternity. From Edwards, Joni learned that trusting and obeying God in her afflictions would increase her capacity for joy, worship, and service in heaven. This was a revelation that would forever shape the way she viewed her own suffering. As Edwards wrote, "They that are highest in degree in glory, will be of the highest capacity; and so having the greatest knowledge, will see most of God's loveliness, and consequently will have love to God and love to the saints most abounding in their hearts."³ Edwards's theology would be a guiding principle for living with paralysis.

Joni's spiritual formation was largely influenced by Puritans and Reformed pastors and theologians, including Elisabeth Elliot, the jungle missionary whose husband was murdered by the indigenous tribe he was seeking to reach. These reformers—and their sturdy, pragmatic approach to experiencing Jesus Christ—provided a safety net for this

quadriplegic as she struggled through setbacks with her severe disability. She gravitated to authors and thinkers who wrote out of their own anguish and heartache.

Joni sat on the back porch of the family farm and listened to cassettes of R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner, modern Calvinists who strengthened her positions of the sovereignty of God and his care, even in bad times. Richard Baxter, an English Puritan, helped her manage her wandering emotions. And Thomas Goodwin taught her about the tenderness of Christ in her afflictions. These teachers guided her away from the theological progressivism popular in the 1970s.

Joni found refreshment in the writings and poetry of Catholic mystics Jeanne-Marie Guyon and François Fénelon. Their experiences of suffering and their expressions of Christ's nearness softened her theology. Catholic theologian Dr. Peter Kreeft and his classic, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, also became a well-worn resource on Joni's bookshelf.

Miss Eareckson became a "five-point Calvinist," a theology known for its strong emphasis on God's sovereignty. The Carmelite monk Brother Lawrence emphasized a person's free will. These two were different theologies, so it was odd that Joni found the humble work of a Carmelite monk meaningful and helpful in her quest for God's peace. Joni had read *The Practice of the Presence of God* shortly after she came to Christ in high school; the book was trending then with young believers. His simple routine of daily knowing, seeing, and apprehending God in his workday habits intrigued her in high school, and now—in the uncluttered

routine of living on the family farm—Joni had occasion to revisit his work. She found *The Practice of the Presence of God* winsome, simple, and engaging, which was a refreshing break from her Reformed writers and thinkers.

Joni found Lawrence's thoughts invigorating. He offered a no-nonsense approach to sin and its decaying effects on a lively relationship with God. But because her afflictions continually tested her faith, she would often fall into sin: grumbling that she could not walk, snapping at her sister, or envying others who went on to marry and start families. The writings of the monk gave a ruthless assessment of sin's damaging influence as well as a tender appreciation for God's grace and forgiveness. The seventeenth-century Carmelite's writings touched her deeply.

She was drawn to Lawrence's authenticity. Here was a Christian man who suffered greatly. Like her, he struggled morally and deeply regretted having wandered far from his spiritual moorings. When he failed spiritually, he admitted his sin and was quick to repent. Joni respected that.

Unlike the unassuming monk, known only for his menial kitchen duties, Joni's renown for her contentment in suffering grew to celebrity status. Her books and the movie produced about her life thrust her onto a global stage. Brother Lawrence's humble posture served as a caution. She was wary of fame's enticements and recognized its only benefit: a wider sphere of influence for Christ. She has kept to this unambitious posture throughout her life.

Over the following decades, Joni would casually flip

through *The Practice of the Presence of God* and be refreshed by Lawrence's noncomplex approach to life and to God. Initially, she was intrigued by his effusiveness over the love and grace of God, as though it were the answer alone to all ailments and evils in the world. It read like spiritual sentimentality. But over time—as she endured much suffering herself—it became clear to Joni that the supreme love of God was, indeed, the answer to the world's tragic predicament.

Lawrence underplayed the redemptive work of Christ as the fullest expression of God's love for a wounded world. Joni recognized this, seeing the difference between her Calvinist theology and his Catholic theology. Still, she found value in Lawrence's call to an uncluttered engagement with God through a daily practice of his presence.

Many far-ranging influences, from Calvinist to Catholic, have contributed to Joni's spiritual formation. Many theological tributaries helped fill the river of this woman's love for Christ, but God's Word and her afflictions are the main source of her adoration and devotion to Jesus Christ. For her, the focus in all her suffering is not to find answers but to find the Answer, God's Son who suffered for her. Joni would say that Jesus is first and foremost the Son of Man who gave his life so that she might have access to God.

If Brother Lawrence had been able to see far into the future of his fellow journeyman Joni Eareckson Tada, he would have smiled to hear her say, "Without Christ, there is no sense in suffering. Without Christ, there is no presence of God."

An Unconventional Pairing

Brother Lawrence lived through the drudgeries of kitchen duty during the 1600s while Paris roiled in the waters of a turbulent France. In this space, he found the secret to peace: being in constant conversation with the Father . . . every day and every hour . . . practicing the presence of God. Brother Lawrence mostly refers to God the Father in *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

While Joni refers to God in all three of his persons, she most often addresses Jesus in this book. After forty years in Christian publishing, I confess that I've never met anyone who has the kind of constant communication with Jesus Christ that Joni experiences. She sings to Jesus as she rolls down her office corridors; she praises him when welcoming everyone she meets; she cheers the Lord for every visiting group that comes into her ministry building. And she also praises God when times are not good—like when she suffers unrelenting pain. She practices the presence of Jesus daily.

How did Brother Lawrence experience such closeness to Jesus, to God, in the seventeenth century, and how does Joni do the same today in the twenty-first? This book will give you a glimpse into the answer.

The Practice of the Presence of Jesus brings Lawrence's and Joni's words together to teach us how to live 24/7 in the peace of their Shepherd. In an inspirational and worshipful way, Lawrence's sayings and Joni's never-before-published meditations and stories strengthen each other to create some-

thing fresh and new. Joni's ink sketches, which she rendered holding a pen between her teeth, are also included. *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus* will help you find a daily rhythm of experiencing the nearness of God in simple yet dramatic ways. Brother Lawrence and Joni trade their thoughts back and forth, making a beautiful song to God. It is the timeless, lilting melody of being with Jesus.

—JOHN SLOAN
Editor Emeritus

Before You Begin

Suffering has a way of heaving you beyond the shallows of life where your faith tends to feel ankle-deep. It casts you out into the fathomless depths of God, a place where Jesus is the only One who can touch bottom.

For more than half a century, at every age, my quadriplegia has taught me how to swim in the depths of God. I am not saying that I swim well. Sometimes I feel like I'm only dog-paddling. Other times I think I'll drown in the waves of pain that crash over me. But Jesus is always my rescuer. He is my anchor, and I cling tighter to him now than ever before. It's because I need him more.

Pain never lets up. It pushes you to limits where you nearly collapse. And sometimes you do. But pain has also melded my heart with my Savior's. I find comfort in the Man of Sorrows who is acquainted with grief (see Isaiah 53:3); he is a better relief and rest than any pain medication.

And it is my pain that has forced a slower pace. I now see

more in his Word. I see Jesus in small and great pleasures. I feel his delight in everything from sun-dappled shadows on a lawn to those breathtaking moments when a wayward soul awakens to gospel truth. Everything means more to me now. Somehow, pain—and perhaps aging—has helped me appreciate life more.

It's why over the last year or so, I've gone back to my tattered copy of *The Practice of the Presence of God*. I remembered how Brother Lawrence's writings first touched me at a younger age when I was healthier and more active. Back in the 1960s, I read Lawrence's little book because everyone was reading it. But now, in a tense post-Covid world, I can say I started reading it again because I knew I would delight in this unassuming monk's approach to life.

Our culture screams at us in a thousand different voices, and at times I can hardly hear my soul breathe. In *The Practice of the Presence of God*, I find the single voice of a humble brother who lowers the volume. His writing is simple, and I like that. Lawrence exercises his faith among pots and pans, scrub buckets, toilets, and dirty floors. . . . I exercise my faith among urine bags, bedpans, wheelchair batteries, support stockings, and an external ventilator.

Life for both the monk and me seems filled with the mundane. But it is also filled with the splendorous majesty of our great triune God.

Lawrence's writing has inspired me. In the ordinary rhythms of life with a disability and its paraphernalia, I practice the moment-by-moment presence of Jesus Christ. I hardly have a

choice in the matter; pain and disability require daily closeness to Christ.

As I have lately journaled what I am seeing and observing about Jesus's presence and about life overall—especially in our dark, frenetic world—I feel my reflections mirror those of Brother Lawrence. But our meditations are not exactly the same. Our seventeenth-century brother references God. I most frequently point to Jesus and his Word.

After pages of journaling, one thing has led to another. And here you are, holding it all in a collection called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. The idea for this volume can be traced to my longtime editor and friend, John Sloan. I'll never forget carefully leafing through his 1896 edition of Brother Lawrence's classic. The pages were yellowed and well-worn from much use. It's obvious my friend John has a great respect for the modest monk, so when he read a few of my devotional entries, he suggested, "Why not put these together with Lawrence's writings?" And the book you have in your hands is the result.

Each entry in this book includes a time-honored vignette from Lawrence followed by related offerings from my own pen. My devotional reflections occasionally reference Lawrence's, but not always. Rather, I just elucidate his key themes. In this small, sturdy book, my intention is to provide scriptural handholds that can move you forward in your awareness of Christ's presence and in your daily dialogue with him.

If my Carmelite friend were sitting next to me, I think he would invite you to absorb both his words and mine with

the same patience and expectancy modeled in our lives. Never rushing. Waiting always. Enduring long. Not scorning the simple tasks of your days. Seeing God in all things. So linger over this book, and give time for each of our reflections to sink in. There is depth and wisdom to be unearthed here.

—JONI EARECKSON TADA
Joni and Friends International
Disability Center

*The Practice
of the
Presence of
Jesus*

Wholly Devoted to Him

I know that for the right practice of the presence of God, the heart must be empty of all other things; because GOD will possess the heart *alone*; and as He cannot possess it *alone*, without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act *there*, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him.

— Brother Lawrence, page 42



HE covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth. Ps. 137

I love practicing the presence of my Savior in the dark of night when I cannot sleep. Rather than contend with anxiety, I empty out my heart and pour the beauties of Jesus into it. I fill it with love words for him, each borrowed from the Bible: “Oh, Jesus, to me you are altogether lovely, the fairest of ten thousand, the bright and morning star, my Bridegroom for whom I long. You are the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley. ‘Your love is more delightful than wine. . . . Your name is like perfume poured out’” (Song of Songs 1:2–3). The heart cannot stay filled with muddled thoughts when its hollows are overflowing with the loveliness of Christ.

The next morning I feel refreshed for having lingered in Christ through the night. I wake up a slightly changed person—more settled and content. It’s a feeling that God is happy with me. But it’s not the smug feeling of being more holy or more righteous or sensing that I have impressed God for having focused so much on his Son; rather, I feel *less* holy. I am *more* aware of my sin, less convinced of my stainless reputation. The fact that I feel more like Paul, the chief of sinners, is an indication that my heart is now a set-apart dwelling where the Spirit of Jesus is pleased to reside. My beautiful Savior has revealed my ugliness of soul, and I fall before him, happy that he is what my heart needs. He’s my everything, my all in all.

*Meditate: What competes in your heart today
with your affection for Jesus?*

My King

My King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastising me, embraces me with love, makes me eat at His table, serves me with His own hands, gives me the key of His treasures; He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly, in a thousand and a thousand ways, and treats me in all respects as His favourite. It is thus I consider myself from time to time in His holy presence.

— *Brother Lawrence, page 34*

Our great King is eager to pour favor on his children. He does not wait for us to come to him; he seeks us out. He is *actively* pursuing us. One Bible version translates Psalm 23:6: “Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life” (NABRE). God pursues us with goodness *by giving us things we haven’t earned*, such as warm friendships, food on the table, peace and safety in our streets, jobs to do, and encouraging words over cups of coffee. God pursues us with mercy *by not giving us what we have earned*, such as judgment. He is quick to forgive and overflowing with love, all because of Jesus. God never grows weary of pouring out mercy and goodness.

But his grace-filled, generous nature goes further: He is a King who enjoys bearing our burdens. He loves to work “for those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4, NLT). He delights in serving us. Not only here on earth but in glory. We think of heaven as a place where we will serve Jesus forever. While that is true, the complete picture is even more breathtaking. In Luke 12:37, Jesus says that “he will dress himself to serve and will have them recline at the table, and he himself will come and wait on them” (BSB). Oh, friend, for all of eternity we will praise a Savior who is full of goodness and mercy, a Savior who delights to serve *us!*

*Meditate: What burdens might Jesus
want to carry for you today?*

A Miserable Sinner?

Give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for His great goodness towards me, which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favours He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am.

— *Brother Lawrence, page 29*

As a little girl dressed in my frilly Sunday best, I'd fold my hands, bow my head, and join our congregation in reciting from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine Majesty."⁴ Think it's strange for a child to pray that way? Perhaps. But even then, I knew my little heart was wicked.

Wicked is a cutting word. We instinctively recoil from it, not willing to admit the evil within us. A person does not merely fudge the truth; he is a liar. He doesn't merely cheat; he's a thief. Without Christ, we are at the core, wicked. There exists a bentness in the human heart. But once we embrace Christ, 1 Corinthians 5:7 tells us to "get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are." In Christ, we *really are* at the core righteous. Yes, from time to time we will sin, as the prayer book says, but it is not in our nature as blood-bought believers to do so habitually. Continuously. Routinely. We have Holy Spirit—help that enables us to be who we truly are. What glorious hope! Today, slice out the serpent of sin that has coiled itself around your heart. Open your soul to the beauties of the gospel and the loveliness of Jesus who rescues you from your transgressions. Ask his Spirit to reinforce your bentness for good and then follow his every prompting to make your heart a worthy home for Jesus.

Meditate: First Corinthians 5:7 is a powerful declaration of your identity in Christ. Think hard on how this should change the way you live.

The Crown

Ever since that time I walk before GOD simply, in faith,
with humility and with love; 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.

— *Brother Lawrence, page 32*

At his coronation in 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte dressed himself in opulent robes, stood, and held the crown above his own head. Everyone else, including the pope, was a mere spectator as he lowered it onto his brow. Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France, demonstrating that he would not be controlled by any power other than himself.⁵

Pride is like that. It crowns itself, ruling over everything wrong about us. But Jesus triumphs over our selfish kingdoms, lovingly insisting we humble ourselves before him. In this humility, we are invited to follow Christ's own example. Jesus "made himself nothing" before his Father, and I must do the same (Philippians 2:7-9). Humility begins with seeing things as they are: God is great, and I am not. He is pure, and I am not. He is light, and the hollows of my heart are dark. He is wise, and I have miles to go. When I see things like this, I am on my way to humility. But humility will escape me if I make anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ my goal. If anyone's crown matters, it's the thorny, bloody one he wore. Yield control of your kingdom to him, and you will possess what no tyrant can claim: true humility.

*Meditate: How in your life is humility
related to surrender to Jesus?*

Trust God at All Times

When I thought of nothing but to end my days in these troubles [doubts of my salvation and the presumption of faith] (which did not at all diminish the trust I had in GOD, and which served only to increase my faith), I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which, till that time, was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace, as if she were in her centre and place of rest.

— *Brother Lawrence, page 32*



When I was first injured, I was filled with so many doubts and fears of the future that I couldn't imagine ever mustering enough trust in God. I figured only holier-than-thou saints on bended knee, with eyes closed and hands clasped, could trust God with something as awful as paralysis. Only plaster-of-paris saints on lofty pedestals could possibly trust him at all times, right?

Psalm 62:8 paints a different picture. Without a hint of exaggeration, the psalmist tells us to “trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us” (ESV). We *can* trust God at all times—not only when it's convenient or when it makes sense or when it's easy, but also when it's counterintuitive to everything within us. Yes, it is possible to trust God in *every* situation. How? Well, through *Jesus*. He gives the command to trust him, then he provides you the power and the will to do it. The minute you “pour out your heart before him,” he animates and energizes your trust in him. The instant you recognize that “God is a refuge for us,” he is right there with you, assuring you that you don't have to go it alone. To trust in the Lord at all times may sound daunting, but it is possible as you pour out your heart before him and make him your refuge.

When you learn to trust God at all times, you won't be Mother Teresa, but you will develop faith that is readily available. Your faith will be easily within reach; you will effortlessly and gently take hold of it. Your faith will be there, ready to believe, trust, yield, and celebrate your trustworthy God.

*Meditate: What barriers prevent you
from fully trusting God?*