

# The Practice of the Presence of God

A 40-Day Devotion  
Based on Brother Lawrence's  
*The Practice of the Presence of God*

Book by Brother Lawrence  
Devotions by Alan Vermilye



The Practice of the Presence of God  
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Version 1

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# Free Bible Study Supplement



Get Your **FREE** Bible Study Supplement to  
*The Practice of the Presence of God!*

Includes:

Small Group Discussion Guide  
The Spiritual Maxims of Brother Lawrence  
The Life of Brother Lawrence

[www.BrownChairBooks.com/Practice](http://www.BrownChairBooks.com/Practice)



# Introduction



WHO IS THIS BROTHER LAWRENCE? And, why should I care about what a monk, who lived over 300 years ago, said about creating a closer relationship with God? Afterall, I'm not a monk. I don't live in a monastery blocked off from the harsh realities of the real world. Things are different today. Times have changed. I cannot sit around all day reading my Bible and chanting some nonsense. I live in the here and now with responsibilities and people that count on me.

At least this is the way it sounded in my head as I made excuses for and questioned whether a book that has been read, studied, and adored by countless Christians over centuries had any validity for a Christ follower today.

So, I committed to read *The Practice of the Presence of God*—a collection of notes, letters, and interviews given by Lawrence to show how to develop a conversational relationship with God. Then I reread it. It's not a long book and is easily digestible so it was not a hard read. But each time I read it, I did so under the pre-conceived notions mentioned above. In other words, I came loaded for bear. It did not stand a chance! Sure, if I were a monk with nothing to do all day but a few chores in the confines of a peaceful monastery, I too could spend all day in the presence of God!

But after further reflection, maybe I was being too harsh. The only way I was really going to understand the value of this classic piece of literature was to set aside any judgement and analyze it honestly.

That's exactly what I did. And in doing so, I felt a growing awareness of just how wrong I was. All my pre-conceived notions were an oversimplification of Brother Lawrence's life and how he developed a conversational relationship with God right in the middle of an ordinary life. Who was I to judge whether his life was any more ordinary than mine!

Yes, Brother Lawrence was a monk, but he was not born in a monastery. Prior to taking his vow, he was a poor peasant who became a soldier in a brutal war and probably saw more carnage and death than we could imagine. He was not immune to the sufferings of life and had many scars, both physical and spiritual, to prove it.

Regarding his faith, he was not overly righteous. Like the Apostle Paul, he considered himself the worst of sinners. Ironically, he never sought to publish a book with instructions for the Christian community, rather he was simply corresponding by letters and interviews with a friend about the depth of his love for God. In fact, he even requested that this information not be shared. He probably would have been mortified to know that his friends published his story and the workings of his spiritual practice after his death in 1691.

And finally, I don't believe Brother Lawrence was providing prescriptive instructions to the Christian believer. It's not a one size fits all. He was simply stating to his friend some tried and true practices that helped him create a deep,

abiding connection with his Creator.

You will find most of his methods rooted in Scripture although he does not quote one verse. And although you might disagree with him on some finer points, overall, I think you will find his ways fairly accurate and timeless. In the very least, it worked for him.

If you really want to save time, I can summarize the book for you like this: To really know, understand, and love God, you must spend time with Him...a lot of time!

However, I think my summary cheapens the deep spiritual wisdom that Brother Lawrence offers to his dear friend. It's one thing to understand a spiritual concept, but a whole other thing to practice it. Like any sport, if you want to get better, you must practice with people who are better than you, and Brother Lawrence was an all-star!

*The Practice of the Presence of God* is a public domain work and not hard to find. A quick search on the Internet will pull up many downloadable copies with a ton of commentary to boot.

What you will not find are many devotionals based on the content of this classic. Therefore, I've laid out a 40-day devotional format with related Scripture passages that will hopefully provide a better understanding of Brother Lawrence's message and overall book. Why 40 days? Well, it's biblical, but more importantly, it fit very well when I laid out the book! Each devotion contains an excerpt from Brother Lawrence, a Scripture reference to read, and a short reflection on the passage. I've also included the entire book of *The Practice of the Presence of God* in the back. I would encourage

you to read it each day alongside your devotions.

You might have noticed that this book is offered for free. Well, at least the e-book is on most platforms. For some time, I've wanted to provide a free book as a gift to everyone who has participated in any of my studies. For those who prefer print, I've kept the price as low as possible, but there are printing and retailer costs that must be covered. However, I still think you'll find it an excellent value!

You will also find a free Bible study supplement online at [www.BrownChairBooks.com/practice](http://www.BrownChairBooks.com/practice). The supplement includes a discussion guide for individual and small group use, *Spiritual Maxims* (or life lessons) by Brother Lawrence, and a more detailed biography titled *The Life of Brother Lawrence* written by his friend Joseph de Beaufort.

I hope you will enjoy this devotional as much as I enjoyed writing it! If you are new to my studies, you can learn more about those resources in the back of this book.

Now for my normal disclaimer. I'm not an expert on the life of Brother Lawrence nor his work, I will leave that to well apt scholars. However, I hope this work will help you set aside any pre-conceived notions you might have about this timeless Christian classic as you meditate over Brother Lawrence's work, life, and related Scriptures in the midst of the challenges you face today.

# Day 1: Becoming Wholly God's



HAVING FOUND in many books different methods of going to God and diverse practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the all for the All. After having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not He, and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world. – *Letter 1*

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*1 Corinthians 2:15-16*

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Imagine a world with just you and God. In this world, you have a present, personal, and indisputable sense that He is all yours and you are all His. Obviously, in the real world you are not alone, but consider for a moment what would change in your life if you were to adopt this mindset. A mindset where the love of everything not Him fades away, freeing you to offer yourself wholly to God. Adopting a “mind of Christ” attitude of continual submission to God enables us to live confidently, joyously, and sacrificially each day.

# Day 2: Think About Such Things



SOMETIMES I CONSIDERED myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge. At other times I beheld Him in my heart as my Father, as my God. I worshipped Him the oftenest I could, keeping my mind in His holy presence and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. I made this my business, not only at the appointed times of prayer but all the time; every hour, every minute, even in the height of my work, I drove from my mind everything that interrupted my thoughts of God.

I found no small pain in this exercise. Yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred. Though I have done it very imperfectly, I have found great advantages by it. – *Letter 1*

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*Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:8*

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What consumes your mind controls your life. Today, try asking God to free you from anxious thoughts and to remind you of all that is commendable and good while keeping your heart fixed on Jesus—not just during prayer time, but all day long.

## Day 3: Hindered or Free?

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WHEN WE ARE FAITHFUL to keep ourselves in His holy presence, and set Him always before us, this hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him. It also begets [creates] in us a holy freedom, and, if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, where, when we ask, He supplies the graces we need. Over time, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God becomes quite natural to us. – *Letter 1*

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*Hebrews 12:1; Galatians 5:13*

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Think of one thing in your life that displeases God. Whatever that is, it's undermining your ability to keep yourself in His holy presence. Now, imagine the freedom you will experience if you yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and begin to obey Christ in that area of your life. The more time spent in His presence, the more familiar we become with Him, and the less likely we are to do things that displease Him.

# Day 4: Renouncing All for Him



IN CONVERSATION SOME days ago a devout person told me the spiritual life was a life of grace, which begins with servile [submissive] fear, which is increased by hope of eternal life, and which is consummated by pure love; that each of these states had its different steps, by which one arrives at last at that blessed consummation.

I have not followed these methods at all. On the contrary, I instinctively felt they would discourage me. Instead, at my entrance into religious life, I took a resolution to give myself up to God as the best satisfaction I could make for my sins and, for the love of Him, to renounce all besides. – *Letter 2*

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*Luke 14:33; Philippians 3:8*

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Brother Lawrence was told that the spiritual life progressed through three stages beginning with fear, then to hope of eternal life, and finally to pure love. He was frustrated by these methods and was determined to focus only on giving himself completely to God. In other words, if he must choose between Christ and anything else, he would choose Christ. Which method are you following?

# Day 5: Always Before Me



YET I MUST TELL YOU that for the first ten years I suffered a great deal. During this time, I fell often, and rose again presently. It seemed to me that all creatures, reason, and God Himself were against me and faith alone for me.

The apprehension that I was not devoted to God as I wished to be, my past sins always present to my mind, and the great unmerited favors which God did me, were the source of my sufferings and feelings of unworthiness. I was sometimes troubled with thoughts that to believe I had received such favors was an effect of my imagination, which pretended to be so soon where others arrived with great difficulty. At other times I believed that it was a willful delusion and that there really was no hope for me. – *Letter 2*

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## *Psalm 51*

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Have you ever felt that something was amiss regarding your soul? Examining your conscience forces you to sit down, pray, and reflect on a real live list of ways in which you've repeatedly fallen short. Only then can God create in you a pure heart growing in holiness and thus, closer to Christ.

# Day 6: Resigned to God's Will



AS FOR WHAT passes in me at present, I cannot express it. I have no pain or difficulty about my state because I have no will but that of God. I endeavor to accomplish His will in all things. And I am so resigned that I would not take up a straw from the ground against His order or from any motive but that of pure love for Him. – *Letter 2*

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*John 3:30; Matthew 16:24-26*

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To be always resigned to the will of God is one of the most beautiful traits of the Christian character and one of the most difficult to master. Unfortunately, we are so indoctrinated by the philosophy of the world that we tend to forget what following Christ is—thinking it's about us without any personal sacrifice. John the Baptist spent his whole life pointing people to Jesus. He was resolved in his mind and actions to increase Jesus, not himself. What areas of your life might you need to decrease in order that you may add more of Him each day until there's slowly but surely—and quite naturally—no room for yourself?

## Day 7: Making it a Priority

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I HAVE CEASED all forms of devotion and set prayers except those to which my state requires. I make it my priority to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I maintain a simple attention and a fond regard for God, which I may call an actual presence of God. Or, to put it another way, it is a habitual, silent, and private conversation of the soul with God. This gives me much joy and contentment. In short, I am sure, beyond all doubt, that my soul has been with God above these past thirty years. – *Letter 2*

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*Luke 10:38-42*

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If you were to make a list of the top priorities in your life, what would it look like? As a Christ follower, we would all agree that God must be first. The question then is, *is He in fact first?* Our priorities, like Martha's, are often so full of the unnecessary. They control us and ruin our attitudes, leaving us distracted by small everyday things. As a result, like Martha, we miss the Lord speaking to us. Nothing is better than hearing the Lord speak, nothing is more important, nothing compares to that.

# Day 8: Flaws and Weaknesses



YET, I THINK it is appropriate to tell you how I perceive myself before God, whom I behold as my King. I consider myself as the most wretched of men. I am full of faults, flaws, and weaknesses, and have committed all sorts of crimes against his King. Touched with a sensible regret I confess all my wickedness to Him. I ask His forgiveness. I abandon myself in His hands that He may do what He pleases with me.

– *Letter 2*

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*Romans 7:15-20; John 14:16-17*

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Paul describes the Christian experience as a constant battle between his spirit and his human nature. He wants to serve God wholeheartedly, but competing desires and priorities are constantly distracting and tripping him up. He doesn't pretend that by trying to do right he will earn God's favor and remove the struggle. And neither should we. Jesus is our only hope, and He alone has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. Becoming sensitive to His leading makes all the difference and enables us to have victory over our old sinful nature.