

Principles of spiritual life

(1/12)

How do I start?

A growing and sustainable spiritual life

By

House of God's Love

Book name: Book series of Principles of Spiritual Life

(1) How do I acquire the love of God?

By: Servants of God's Love Hostel

- We hope in Christ that this series would reach the hands of every Christian youth.
- You could share this hope by giving it to your friends and loved ones.

Introduction

Many want to proceed in spiritual life, and many start but do not continue in spite of their commitment at the beginning. Inconsistency is frequently due to the absence of a spiritual scheme to follow. This series is a simplified scheme for spiritual life that we hope you try, and you shall see the results yourself, with the grace of Christ. + This series is made up of sets: the first is a 12-part set that is similar to school workbooks, where there are textbooks and practical workbooks. + The workbook is useless if you read it only; steps in the book should be applied in practice to achieve results. The workbook might require the help of a teacher to follow up on the practical steps, particularly when doing the experiment for the first time.

Finally, remember that experiments may fail many times; but one should never give up. If you fail, review your steps and rest assured that it shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow, for He is your Father and He loves you. May God, our Father, keep us in His love and let us grow in His grace, Amen.

I went on my way to meet with the spiritual father recommended by a friend of mine. Frankly, I had become so lost in my spiritual life, harboring contradicting feelings, with ups and downs, tiresome thoughts, and a burdensome feeling of guilt. Moreover, this was coupled sometimes with a feeling of pride, that I am superior to others. On my journey, I have seen dunes of sand and pebbles that demonstrated the ups and downs of time and the changing direction of the wind. These were reminders that made me tell myself that even nature shares the fluctuation and change. When I arrived at the location of the spiritual father, he welcomes me and we sat down.

He said: How are you, son?

I said: good, thank God. But I am so tired. I am exhausted by the constant fluctuation in my spiritual life and the thoughts. Every time I go on well with my life for a while, I fall again ... falls and troubles. Quite often I am close to despair, or I do despair. I am drained by the lack of inner peace and the sense of guilt haunts me. I have so many fluctuating feelings.

He said: this is natural, son.

I said (questioningly): Is it natural that I fall into sin, father? Is it normal that there would be no inner peace?! Is it normal to be desperate, act like a hypocrite so often, and be vain at other times?!

He said: this is the nature of the old man; the nature of the material man; but if you want to walk along the spiritual road and to start a true spiritual life, you will have to learn about some spiritual principles.

I said: I want to start, father, with all my heart; but I started many a time, only to fail. I want to start a real new beginning this time.

He said: there are three principles in spiritual life, son.

I said: what are they?

He said: **the first principle of spiritual life is**

Spiritual life is a path and not a step .. not a moment

I said: what does that mean, father?

He said: Many have begun on the spiritual path, many have taken the first step, but have not continued. They took steps after they:

Heard a moving sermon, saw a painful situation or accident, or were awakened by the Holy Spirit.

So, one of them would say: “I am going to change and become a new person. I will not fall into sin again.” A few weeks or even days later, the person would fall again; and the devil would tell him “You will not make it ... the spiritual road is hard ... you will fail no matter how much you try”. Satan would keep telling him so until he gives up ... the latter would remain desperate until he hears another sermon or sees a moving incident or goes through a hardship once again.

Thus, the person would fall into a vicious circle where s/he goes well for a while, falls, despairs, remains as such until s/he starts all over again.

I said: this is exactly what happens to me, father. But what is the solution?

He said: you have to know and to believe that this is spiritual life. It is a life not a moment. Indeed, life begins with the moment of birth, but it is not a moment in its entirety. The long road starts with a step, but it is not a step.

I said: what do you mean, father?

He said: Do not wait until you are free from all the sins, lusts and habits, all of a sudden. Do not expect to go on praying day and night and for the tears to be non-stop, and do not expect that your hands would exude oil unexpectedly!!

Start by regretting every sin. Judge every sin to be a sin. Do not call it but by its name. Know that you are a sinner. Begin the spiritual path and if you fall get up and never despair.

Do not think that when you fall, you'll be a failure and you will not make it; just be patient and hold on to hope.

Once there was a married man who had no children for twelve years. He consulted many doctors, and finally a guy told him "let's go to Al Manahra and ask for the intercession of Father Abdel Messih." He went with him, prayed faithfully, and in a year he got a beautiful child. He was so happy and would go and check on the baby every now and then and cuddle him. But, when that baby becomes two months old, something strange happened.

I said: what is that, father?

He said: The father went to see his son, only to find him standing on his feet and getting taller and taller, until he reached 1.5 m. All of sudden, he grew a moustache and a beard. The father was so scared. The child said, laughing "what's wrong with you, go on make me some tea or coffee".

Here, my father stopped talking and addressed me, astonished as I was, and said: what would you do if you were in that father's place?

I said: Of course I would run or fall dead from surprise. But, is this a true story, father?

He said: It is only a story. A child can never grow up in two months and grow a moustache and a beard.

Therefore, my son, do not ask to grow in spiritual life all of a sudden.

**It shall come to pass
in the day the Lord
gives you rest from
your sorrow
(Isaiah 14:3)**

Be patient. Begin only by judging the sin as being sin, and by judging yourself to be a sinner. Repent to God and know that:

I said: when would that day come, would it be when I die?

He said (smiling): of course not ... it would be in your lifetime. At the beginning of the spiritual life, the war is hard: from the outside, wars of the devil and the world and its lusts; and from the inside, the old rotten nature. But with the progression of spiritual life, we grow in our internal freedom, gain strength, and the war becomes from the outside. Thus, things become a lot easier; and this is how the saints progressed.

But, since speed has become a feature of our lives, in computers, means of transport and the Internet, even food has become ‘take away’, this was reflected on our spiritual life. The saints have started step by step. They would doze and sleep in their prayers at the beginning, to the extent that they would tie up their hands and hair to stay awake. But after years of growth, they would spend the nights wide awake praying without feeling exhausted. Saint Moses the Black, at the beginning of his repentance, had struggled with the devils who fought him with lusts, unclean thoughts and evil habits. He would go to his spiritual father complaining many times, day and night. He struggled and was patient until the day he toughen up spiritually and became free.

I said: will that day really come, when I become relieved of these sins?

He said: the Lord Jesus said “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36), and God is true to His promises; **only** if you are patient, this day will come. Rest assured that as long as you are on the path, then you are in the right direction. You are at school and you are learning. As St. Isaac said:

“I’d rather die fighting than live in sin”

Many have begun, my son, but have not continued because they failed to recognize this truth. They wanted a hasty fruit, thus they achieved nothing; instead, they relapsed to their original state accompanied by despair and failure.

The purpose of the devil is not to make you fall into sin, at all (this is a transitional objective). The final objective is to make you despair and give up, thus he focuses on one sin or two (which we will elaborate further on when we discuss the issue of repeated sinning.)

I said: shall I sin and be careless about sinning, saying “I can sin as much as I want, for I am in school and I’m still learning?!”

He said: this is the second principle, my son.

I said: what is that?

He said: **the second principle is:**

**There are two types of sins
... sins committed willingly and sins committed**

I said: what is the difference between the two?

He said: the difference is:

Before committing a sin willingly, I would go easy on myself and say “we’re still young, we want to live, this is a simple sin, it’s only a harmless curse, and everybody does that.”

“Justification and carelessness are deemed as treason to Christ”

Sinning willingly means that I reject repentance, and I say I’m better than others, I’m not that bad, I’ll repent later in life for I’m still young.

One sin of this kind could lead me to hell, even if it is just a curse.

I said: just a curse could lead me to hell? Then who would not end up there?

He said: the wage for any sin that I justify and refuse to repent for is death. The Lord Jesus said: “whoever says to his brother, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire”, and said “unless you repent you will all likewise perish”.

Sinning willingly

Is getting careless with sin before falling into it; and after falling into it, I justify it to myself and do not repent for it, which is premeditated treason. In the Criminal Code, premeditation has the toughest penalty.

I said: is there a remedy for this sin? And if I fall into it, would that mean that I will definitely perish?

He said: **no, my son, there is a remedy for every sin.**

The remedy of sinning willingly is:

Repentance. It requires one phrase “I have sinned”. When you say ‘I have sinned’, you hear the voice of the Spirit telling you ‘The LORD has also put away your sin’. You have to recognize that it is treason, to refrain from justifying it, and acknowledge that unless you repent, you shall perish. Do not say it is a small sin. You have to know that any sin, unless repented for, carries the wage of death. When you realize that, go back, repent and humble yourself before God. Tell Him:

“Forgive me Jesus for I am a sinner. This sin overtakes my being but I am Your son, please come and free me. Make me repent so I would repent and do not let me perish.”

I said: I did not know that a small sin would have all those consequences. I thought that was for big sins that angered God, which would lead me to hell.

He said: indeed my son, many people are not aware of that. They curse, swear and judge, not knowing that this quenches the Spirit within them. They go easy on the little foxes, which gives the big foxes the opportunity to destroy them.

I said: what if I keep falling in a sin regularly, although I detest and reject it?

He said: this is the sin committed unwillingly.

I said: does a person do anything unwillingly?

He said: unwillingly means that I reject the sin, I'm struggling against it and trying to flee from it. However, my will could yield to it and I fall. It is something that we all experience. Thus, the church arranged in the prayers for us to say "those which we have committed willingly and those we have committed unwillingly ... O Lord forgive us, for the sake of Your Holy name which is called upon us". Moreover, sins committed unwillingly, when I commit them, I do not justify them, but I regret and repent for them.

The devil, in a sin committed willingly, would tell you "God is kind, He is gentle, let us sin and repent later on".

But, in a sin committed unwillingly, seeing you sad, remorseful and seeking repentance, Satan would tell you "you sin every day, you are careless, God is tired of you, you are a traitor not fit for the spiritual path, you are an addict of sin and a slave of evil, you will never be free."

I said: so, what do I do when he tells me that?

He said: tell him "Jesus loves sinners"; "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise"; "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick". Be sure that God loves you very much. Whenever the devil tell you

“loser, loser”, tell him that and shout back at him with spiritual hooliganism.

I said (smiling): what is spiritual hooliganism?

He said: it is to tell him toughly

I do not care; Jesus loves me

Does the Lord Jesus love you much or little?

I said: very much ...

He said: So, don't you care a bit ... practice spiritual hooliganism 50 times a day.

He continued (smiling): within a month you will become a hooligan feared by the devil; and know that

**God sees the sinner as a sick son who
needs to be treated rather than a criminal
who deserves to be punished**

As long as you are remorseful, reject evil deeds, acknowledge that you are a sinner and refuse to keep sinning, then rest assured that God loves you very much. Keep calling and wait for the day when you will be set free.

Imagine a father who has an infant whom he loves very much. One day the baby had diarrhea. Every time his dad would hold him, he would poop because of the diarrhea, and his father would ask the baby's mom to clean him up. Every time

he would hold him, he would soil himself again, and the father would ask that the baby be cleaned again. Would the father get sick and tired of his baby and say “throw him out in the street and get us another clean baby?” or would he hold him in his arms and say “My heart goes to you my son; I wish it were me in your place.”

I said: Of course he would tolerate him and be kind to him as a father.

He said: then that is what the Lord Jesus would do, for He is the One to put mercy in the hearts of fathers and mothers. When you fall because of your weakness, He would tell you “You are my son, come back because I love you”. You would say “I am a sinner, Lord. I fall very often.” He would say “a righteous man may fall

A brother asked a spiritual father: when the devils fight me with unclean thoughts or wet dreams, they stop me from praying for being unclean. The father said: a mother puts her son on the floor and the child wallows in the dirt, soiling himself; the child looks at his mother with lifted arms and tearful eyes, she would swiftly lift him up not caring about any of his dirt. Similarly, when we fall in any sin, we should run to God in tears and He shall accept us in spite of our uncleanness, and clean us up.
(Bostan Al Rohban, 197)

seven times and rise again". You say "I fall more than seven times a day, Lord." Lord Jesus would say "even if you fall a million times, you are my son, come back and do not despair."

God, my son, is all merciful and loving. So, if the human father, with all his weaknesses, does that, then how much would God do to us? If we suffer from spiritual "diarrhea" – if I may say – and we repeatedly fall into sin because of our weakness, what would God do to us? He would take us, clean us and say "I am not mad at you, but I feel sorry for you."

So do not ever despair my son, no matter what your sin may be, in terms of repetition or wickedness, just do not go easy and justify it to yourself. Tell yourself I am a sinner, repent and return; and trust in full forgiveness.

I said: If I die in my sin, what would become of me?

He said: the army has a corps called the Military Police, have you heard of it?

I said: No, I haven't.

He said: they are present in main metro and train stations. They have a red badge on which it is written Military Police. This corps has a mission at the time of war.

I said: what is it?

He said: they stand behind the army at war time holding guns. When the war begins, if a soldier attempts to flee upon seeing the tanks and the warplanes, they shoot him, take his body and present it to a military court. He would be tried, then shot nine times before his battalion, each time naming him “traitor, traitor”.

I said: why is that?

He said: because if treason penetrated the army, the army would be defeated. But when a fighter steps on a landmine and gets injured, the Military Police rush to him, get him in the ambulance and transport him to the hospital. They call him a hero, and if he dies they call him a martyr.

So, both soldiers fell and died, but **one is a traitor who was tried**, and the other is **a martyr who was dignified**. Look and see which one you are in the spiritual war.

I said: but the devil tells me frequently that I am a sinner, and that I commit the sin willingly because I have an inner love for sin.

He said: do not listen to the voice of the devil

As long as you regret the sin and do not justify it; as long as you ask from God to set you free; as long as you do not want to live in sin and struggle

against it; then God looks at you as a fighter and a hero. Do not be unjust to yourself, even if you like sin at the beginning of your spiritual life, for as long as you reject it, be sure the day will come when you will hate it.

We will elaborate further on this matter at the stage of being relieved from sin.

I said: when do I know that I am a traitor?

He said: when you let sin in, justify it, accept to live with it and refuse to return. This is treason. And beware of this statement which says “God will take a man only in his best condition”.

I said: is this statement untrue?

He said: it is against the commandments of the Bible, against the words of the Lord Jesus.

I said: How?! I used to believe in it as if were the Bible, and so do many of my relatives and friends.

He said: this is an illusion. The Bible says “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”, “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief”, and “your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion”. Judas died at his worst, and many die as sinners, murderers and thieves. Such people should have died as

innocent children, so that none of them would have done anything and none would have gone to hell.

I said: what is the source of this statement?

He said: people say it, when a youth or a child dies, to console their relatives with fallacious words. The devil used it to numb people and make them postpone their repentance. The Book said “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”. Therefore, the lack of knowledge is a driver to sinning and perishing. If people knew that, they would be prepared and hold on to the Lord Jesus by constant daily repentance and complete trust in forgiveness. If they knew the love of Jesus, they would never despair. They would return to God every day, repentant. If they knew that any sin is an adversary to God and leads to hell, they would never permit themselves to curse or give bad looks or commit any sin.

I said: I want a comparison between the sin committed willingly and that committed unwillingly.

He said:

The sin committed willingly: before sinning there is carelessness (we are young, let us live, this is a simple sin, we can sin and repent later)

After committing the sin: justification (I am weak, everybody does that, we'll repent later)

The sin committed unwillingly: before the sin there is resistance (I refuse, I try to flee, I try with all my might not to fall)

After committing the sin: remorse (I am a sinner, I feel desperate, I feel frustration and self-belittled, I feel a horrible feeling of being unclean and undeserving)

The remedy: the sin committed willingly: it requires an acknowledgment that it is treason. It requires the phrase "I have sinned" (from the heart). It needs remorse, repentance and non-justification.

The sin committed unwillingly needs hope, no matter what the sin is in terms of repetition of wickedness. It requires a speedy return and complete trust in full forgiveness.

Precautions: the sin committed willingly: beware of carelessness and justification, even with a small sin.

The sin committed unwillingly: beware of despair no matter how many times you fall.

I said: what is the third principle of spiritual life?

He said: the third principle is:

**The Lord Jesus, when he was on Earth,
had two types of interaction**

With tax collectors and sinners: he loved them, sat among them, encouraged them to repent, and made them feel acceptable and forgiven.

With Pharisees and priests, who keep the law and are present in the temple and know the commandments: he rebuked and reproached them because they were hypocrites, just as the proverb goes “glamorous from the outside and drab from the inside”, “like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” (Mathew 23:27).

**The third principle is to say no to “despair” and no to
“justification”**

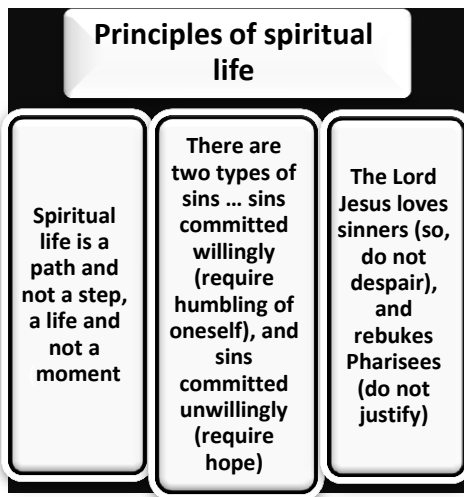
I said: what does that mean?

He said: once two brothers came from a village in Upper Egypt to study in Cairo. They slipped on the road of deviance, from cigarette smoking to doing drugs and visiting brothels. They moved to a different apartment so no one would know their address, they changed their phone numbers, and they stopped contacting their families. The father found no other

way but to send them letters to their college begging them to come back. The older son replied to his father harshly, saying “forget that I am your son. I am now living my life freely. I was not living among you. Do not try to contact or send any letters to me anymore.” The father was distraught and was very sorry for his elder son. The younger son said, “I do not deserve to be your son, I am a shame to you, I have become an addict, I cannot return. What would the people say about you, my father? Please

forgive me. I tried to stay away from drugs and sin but could not.” The father replied, “Please come back just as you are. I write you with the tears of my eyes and the

blood of my heart. Do not make me lose both of you in one week. Do not bother about people. Just come back as you are, I love you and accept you no matter



what your situation is. Please be kind to me and come back, my son.”

The son replied, “I tried many times and failed. Father, I have become the remnants of a human. I am a shame on you. I write to you with my blood (traces of blood were found on the letter), but I cannot come back. I am a mass of evil and uncleanness.” These heart-wrenching letters kept going back and forth, but the younger son did not return. Until a day the two brothers were on their way to Alexandria in the summer. They had an amount of cannabis and marijuana. On their way, the bus toppled over and many passengers died, including the two brothers. Their lives ended a tragic end and both of them perished. One was arrogant and justified sin; the other was desperate and hopeless.

I said: this is a tragic story.

He said: this is the story of everyone who does not come back and repent, be him arrogant and justifying his acts, or desperate and hopeless. We are all sinners, my son, we all need the Christ. Let us just return no matter what our situation is, and say “We have sinned before you Lord, please forgive us”. He will accept us, clean us, and remove all of our sins.

I said: indeed, God is kind and very compassionate.

He said: ever since our weak nature fell and our father Adam sinned, lusts penetrated into us and spoiled our nature. So, no matter how much we try and fight, fast all the fasts, pray every day, have Holy Communion every week, read the Bible every day: all that would do nothing.

I interrupted: is there no use of all those spiritual practices?

He said: let me finish, son. Of course spiritual media are media of grace. But if we perform them as ceremonials, rites and rituals, with no essence and love, then they are useless. We become as any other non-Christian.

I said: how do spiritual practices become useful and align with the Bible?

He said: **when the motive is love**. St. Paul says “because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). When the love of God enters into us, our internal emotional longings and lusts disappear and end, but bit by bit. When I love God, I like to talk to Him in prayer all the time. He would be on my mind every moment. I would like fasting to control the lusts of the flesh so it would not lead me into lusts. Then, not only the tithe would be God’s, but all of my life. That is why the first commandment

is “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”.

I said: how is that?

He said, taking an empty glass: what is this?

I said: an empty glass.

He said: no, it is full.

I said: full of air.

He said: can we extract the air out of this glass?

I said: of course not.

He said: exactly. But if we fill this glass with water, would the air remain in it?

I said: of course not. The air will be driven out.

He said: by the same token, when the love of God gets into our hearts, we would be liberated from the lusts and emotional longings.

I said: how do I acquire God’s love. I have often heard of God’s love in sermons, recorded tapes and meetings. To love God: the most important love. But I need practical steps: if I follow them, I should expect some results, and if I ignore them, I should deserve the consequences!

The grace of God always works for our good. When it leaves us, all man’s deeds become useless.
Father Daniel “Divine Love”, p. 313

He said: I will tell you three very simple things which anyone can do. If you implement them, you should see the result, and if you do not, then you would be the one who rejected them. You can acquire the love of God by three simple things, namely:

Talk to God in retail not in wholesale

I said: what is the meaning of in retail not in wholesale?

He said: it means that you should talk to God in everything and share with him all the details of your life, even the simple ones. For instance, when you sit to study and could not find your pen, say “where is the pen, Lord. I need the pen, Lord”. When you come across a difficult part in your curriculum say “Lord, open my mind and help me understand”. When the bus or the metro is late say “Lord, I need to reach my school or college”. Even when you are getting dressed, say “Lord, shall I put on this shirt or that one”. Be like a child with his father. Also, the farmer in his land, while he is farming he should pray “Lord, bless the plants; Lord, bless the kids”. Each one of us while attending to his business should do the same, in all the matters of our lives.

Talk to God about all the details of your life.

He said: are these considered prayers? Do I talk to God about all those tiny things so simply?

He said: yes, son, this is prayer; a very acceptable one to God. **All that you say is prayer**, because prayer is a connection with God. God is our Father and He loves us very much. Do you call God in your troubles, hardships and problems?

I said: yes I do, whenever I feel weak I call on Him.

He said: do you call on Him at the time of trouble and forget about him on other days? When you call on God in small things, He would be happier because you proclaim your total weakness before him. God said “for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2Corinthians 12:9), and St. Paul said “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (2Corinthians 3:5). When we call on Him in everything, and talk to Him constantly on regular days as on days of exams and troubles, He becomes a close friend and not a relationship of interests.

I said: Could God be a friend of mine?

He said: Yes, and He wants that. In the Book of Isaiah, He says “Abraham My friend” (Isaiah 41:8). In the Book of Proverbs, He says He is “a friend who sticks closer than a brother”. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples “No longer do I call

you servants ... but I have called you friends”. He told them “My friends, do not be afraid”. When we talk to God regularly, He becomes a friend. As the proverb goes “alienation generates disaffection”. We might have had friends from primary or middle school, but now we have forgotten all about them; we might see them and not recognize them. But when we deal with a person regularly, friendship and love grow.

The proverb also goes “Do you know this person, you say: I do; have you had a close relationship with him? You say: no; Then, you do not know him!” So you say you know God when you do not interact with Him, then how come you say you know Him? When you interact with God frequently you cannot sin; and if you do

(because of our weak nature), you’d come back quickly and have faith in full forgiveness.

I said: How is that?

He said: when God is with you in the means of transportation, in your study, while sleeping or awake, and you talk to Him about everything (1Thessalonians 5:10), you could not disappoint Him – by cursing, looking a bad look or judging

He who knows
that the Christ
accompanies him
would be
ashamed to
commit evil.
Fr. Maximus,
Bishop of Turin

someone) because He is your beloved friend. Even if you fall, **and we all do**, you come back quickly and trust in full forgiveness; because your friendship is too strong to make Him say “you are not My Son, I do not know you”. If you do something wrong at home, would your father tell you “get out, you are not my son?”

I said: Of course not. He might blame me, explain to me, discipline me, but he would never throw me out or disown me.

He said: and so does God when you deal with Him in all your chores He becomes a father and a friend. You love and trust Him. You accept forgiveness; because the devil burdens many people with guilt for old sins committed in childhood or adolescence. He would tell them those were not forgiven, saying “this sin committed in primary school was a disaster, or that sin committed in middle school was never confessed ... those sins will stay for good.”

I said: indeed he often fights me with such thoughts, so what is the solution?

He said: this is a major disaster in spiritual life, and we will elaborate further on this matter when we come to inner peace and forgiveness. But now

Use the dead time to talk to God

I said: and what is dead time?

He said: the dead time is the time in which you do nothing, like when you are on your way to your college or work or on the bus, what do you do? Do you invent rocket science? Instead of wasting your time, stumbling on bad sights or becoming frustrated by the over crowdedness, pray my son and talk to God about your problems and your sins so He would liberate you (from habits and thoughts and lusts), thank Him, ask on behalf of others (your family, friends, church ...), use your time in something spiritual. All of that makes God a friend of yours and gets Him closer to you. Never waste time without benefitting from it. The best benefit is to talk to God and to make God your friend. Pope Kyrillos VI said **“By praying, we move the hand that controls the entire world”**.

Frankly, if we realized the value of prayer, we would not stop talking to God for a single moment.

Anything that you say to God at any time, in any place, is prayer.

I said: do I have to tell God about my needs; for He already knows all of my needs?

He said: indeed He knows the needs of everybody, but He likes us to ask. He said “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If

anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him". He also said "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find". He will not impose Himself unto us.

Hence, you should talk to Him about all the details of your life, as a son asking from his father and not as a beggar begging for alms to take them and run off with them.

When St. Anthony went into the desert, the devils fought him with many wars. They would appear to him as fearful beasts, and he would make the sign of the cross and make them vanish. They would appear as dancing and singing, he would close his eyes and make the sign of the cross and they'd vanish. They'd throw gold and silver before him, he would step on it and mark himself with the sign of the cross. But once they went to his cave on the mountain in the form of dwarf kids. When they started to hit him he fought back thinking that he could overcome them. But they dropped him to the ground, beat him up very hard and dragged him saying: let's throw him off the mountain and get rid of him.

St. Anthony begged, "Please Lord, help me Lord," and the devils instantly disappeared. St. Anthony cried, and God called him "Anthony, Anthony, why are you crying?" He cried even harder and said, "Lord, You saw them beat me up, and You are

asking me why am I crying?" The Lord Jesus said, "Anthony, when you called me I came to you, but you relied on yourself."

I said: whenever the devil fights me with any thoughts or when I run into any problem, or even in ordinary matters, I must call on God.

He said: exactly. Consider yourself a small child, and in every matter tell yourself

"I need to consult my father"

Consult your heavenly Father in every matter and you shall be content.

I said: but if I called upon God and He did not come, I did not hear his voice, or He did not respond, what do I do?

He said: this is the second thing to do to acquire the love of God.

I said: what is it the second thing to acquire God's love?

He said: the first thing is retail not wholesale. The second thing is:

Happy is he who forgets the worldly talk by talking to You; because from You his entire needs would be fulfilled. You are his food and drink, You are his sun and daylight.
St. Yuhanna Saba

Interact with God with a bare face

I said: what do you mean by ‘a bare face’?

He said: it means that you tell him all that you have inside of you. I might pretend towards you, you might pretend towards me. A person might pretend to himself and believe himself. But one cannot pretend towards God.

I said: what does that mean?

He said: you might ask something from God and he was slow and did not reply – from your point of view – so you feel upset and frustrated. But when you pray and say “I thank you Lord for every condition, concerning every condition, and in every condition”, and then get out of the church and say within yourself or among people “where is God, why is He ignoring me, why is he so late to respond to me”. God is saddened by such prayers because they are pretentious and hypocritical. He would tell you, “Are you defaming me in public, is that paternity?”

I said: what do I do when I feel that God has not responded to me or was slow to respond to me?

He said: Blame God gently, for He knows all that is inside of you, He won't be shocked. You are not telling him something new, you're only being candid with Him. Pray and say:

"I am disappointed, Lord, why are you late. Please Lord make me understand and accept Your will. Do not leave me to suffer." If you like a sin (lust, addiction, uncleanness, ...) and are unable to quit it, ask and tell Him:

"Lord, I like sin, but I am your son, please liberate me and do not leave me a servant of sin. Take out its love from my heart. I tried many times and failed. You alone can do that Lord, and nothing is too hard for you."

Tell God all that is in your heart, but keep the following principle

I said: what principle?

He said:

Blame God gently like a son to his father

But

Do not grumble like a servant to his master

A servant, at the time of slaves, would tell his master "Any commands master, at your service master, good night master", and turn his back to say "May God take vengeance from you, you are a harsh master" and grumble against his master. But

the son would tell his father “Father, you promised to get me a cell phone or a laptop, I want so and so and you should keep your promise, have you forgotten?” But before other people, the son shows respect and courtesy towards his father, and inside he feels love and satisfaction towards him.

I said: forgive me father, this is the first time I hear such a thing. Is there anything in the Bible to support this?

He said: yes, David the prophet says “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (though he did not say these words with the same attitude as we pray them now). He would cry and shout to God, and God never got mad and would always respond.

Jeremiah in chapter 4 said unusual words “Lord GOD! Surely You have greatly deceived this people” and sent us into captivity.

I said: what did God say to him?

He said: what is wrong with you, Jeremiah, have you forgotten that you are made of dust and ashes. You have to know your standing or I will turn you into an ape or a swine.

I said: Did God really tell him that?

He said: of course not. In chapter 5, He told him I have not deceived you, but your sins brought on this destruction. You

have not obeyed My words and have not followed My law and worshipped idols. You brought the evil upon yourselves.

Job tells God “Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort”, which meant take it easy on me. He also tells Him “He also has taken me by my neck ... He has set me up for His target”.

I said: this is very bold. What did God do to him?

He said: God did not get mad at him, but replied to him. He explained to him that He created everything for him and that He loved him. Job said “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You ... I repent in dust and ashes.”

David, the prophet, says:

“To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me” (Psalm 28:1), “You sell Your people for next to nothing, And are not enriched by selling them” (Psalm 44: 12), and “Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide” (Psalm 10:1).

Habakkuk, the prophet, says:

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save” (Habakkuk 1:2)

Isaiah, the prophet, says:

“O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, And hardened our heart from Your fear?” (Isaiah 63: 17)

Did God get upset with all those prophets?! Are we better or at a higher standing than them in our spiritual lives?

Express your feelings, son: if you want to thank, thank; if you want to blame, blame.

God is democratic. He is not a dictator.

Tell God all that is in your heart. Do not embellish and choose phrases that do not express what is within you. Just never forget the following principle:

Blame God gently like a son to his father, but do not grumble like a servant to his master.

Also, when you talk to God with a bare face, speak plainly and do not choose your words.

I said: what does that mean?

Talk to God plainly as though you were talking to your earthly father.

Do not say “I thank You, I love You, because ...” as if you’re delivering a speech. Imagine that you are standing before your father¹, telling him “O dignified and esteemed father, I need from you twenty pounds as my allowance for this week. Thank You. Your son ...” What would he do to you?

¹ We mean kind and wise fathers, because some fathers are harsh and unkind to their sons.

I said: he would laugh, or think that I've gone crazy or mad.

He said: imagine that all your life, your interactions with your father are like: "Good morning, dear Father", "Good evening, dear Master", "I would like to talk to You on a matter, honored Father". How would he feel?

I said: he must feel annoyed. He would ask me to speak plainly.

He said: we do that so often in our prayers. We say fancy rhyming words that we do not feel, and that do not express what is inside us. All our prayers are mere talk; and instead of being accepted by God, they become ineffective.

Imagine a student who passed his tests, ranked first on his class with a grade A (or a farmer who produced a plentiful harvest while that of his neighbors was infested by pests). In the morning, he felt so happy and said I'll take the Agbeya and pray to thank God. Then, he comes across the psalm that says "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" What would God say?

I said: frankly, I do not know. But I think God would say "After I stood by you and helped you, is that what you have to say?" And father, isn't that what is written in the psalm?

He said: indeed this is what is written in the psalm, but do we read what is written or do we pray it. Pray my son, or else it would hold true to you what is written in the Bible “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8)

Speak to God from your heart, with your true feelings and your own words. Express what you want to say. Do not say just words. Do not say I'll say what is written in the book, for then your prayers would be reading and reciting, not prayer. They would be an assignment and a routine. God would hear nothing of it, and feel sorry that you are not treating Him as a father who listens, but as a master whom you submit to and obey with no real relationship.

Fr. Abdelmessih Al Manahry, when he prayed the psalm of “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?” he would say “How long will I forget You”. I am the one who forgets You, I am the one who is always too busy for you. But God, you always remember me, do not let me forget You. Talk to God with a bare face with plain words that express you situation.

I said: I fear to use plain words and go wrong with the prayer, make doctrinal or theological mistakes, or say words

that do not befit God; thus my prayers would bring the wrath of God on me and He would curse instead of bless me.

He said (smiling): speak all that is in your heart plainly. God will look at your heart not at your words. He would never curse you.

As long as you talk to Him like a son, be comfortable talking to Him as a father, even if your words are not so accurate at the beginning.

There was a father named Raouf who had a small child who was learning how to speak. They would tell him say papa, he would say “Pa .. Pa”; say mama, he’d say “Mma .. mma”; say Raouf, he’d say “Ouf”; say Raouf, he’d say “Ouf”. One time, the child, instead of saying Raouf, said “kharouf” (sheep). Would his father get mad at him and tell him “Are you calling me a sheep and you are only a child; then what will you call me when you grow up?” Would he spank him?

I said: of course not, everybody would laugh and feel happy that the child started to pronounce words.

He said: God will be pleased when you talk to Him like a son and express what is inside of you. Just start and you will learn with time.

I said: what is the third thing for me to acquire the love of God?

He said: before I tell you what the third thing is, there is a small point that you should give attention to when you talk to God with a bare face.

I said: what is it?

He said: it is to cry to Him, i.e. to express your feelings to God, to express your needs before Him.

I said: does that mean that I have to pray with a loud voice?

He said (smiling): no, my son. Crying does not mean to cry with your voice, but to cry with your heart. You could be in the middle of a group, in the street, or in the church, and you cry to God with your heart and no one can hear you.

I said: why should one cry?

He said: crying shows two things:

First: it shows humbleness and need. When you are too busy studying and you hear your little brother crying in pain, you'd say he must have hurt himself while playing, and go on with your studying. But when you hear him screaming in agony, you leave everything and run to him.

Second: it shows confidence. If you cry to someone and he does not respond, you will not cry to him again if you are not sure that he would respond.

Once a brother went from Upper Egypt to Alexandria in summer. He went to the beach. The weather was hot, and the water looked good. This brother went into the water and began to head towards the deep. People told him to be careful not to drown, for the waves were strong. He said “am I a little child?” They said, “It’s not a matter of being little or grown up, just be careful”. He would not listen and went deeper until the waves pulled him and he began to drown. His pride prevented him from calling for help, but after a while he began to swallow seawater and realized he was going to drown and die. So he started to say in a shy, barely-heard voice “help, help, someone take my hand”. He did not want to cry out loud; is anybody going to go to him?

I said (smiling): of course not, for no one will hear him. Even if anyone does, they’ll think he’s faking it.

He said: so, cry to your heavenly Father with all your heart, express your needs, express your suffering, and he must respond. Do not stop until he responds. Remember the example of the Canaanite woman who went after Jesus until

she got what she wanted; and the blind man who kept crying until Jesus heard him ... you do the same.

I said: I'll keep crying, father, and I won't do that again. It is enough what has been wasted of my life spent in lassitude, ignorance and fear from interacting with God as a loving father and close friend. What else is there for me to acquire the love of God?

He said: the third thing is

Make comparisons

I said: what comparisons?

He said: you sit with yourself and make a comparison. See who is the one or what is the thing that you love most in your life; then ask to love God more.

See who comes first in your life in terms of love, care and thought. This could be your father or mother, your siblings or friends; to some, the most important one is oneself, one's ego, or money, science, or addiction of the Facebook or the Internet.

I said: does that mean I should not love my kin and family?

He said: of course not. The Bible said "Honor your father and mother", but it also said "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or

daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” This comparison was made in the Bible, and its result was really difficult (is not worthy of Me). But through God, you will love them more than you did, you will love your kin, family, friends, work and studies.

I said: how is that?

He said: when God is first in your life, through Him you will love all these more than before, true unchanging love.

There was a young man who loved his family very much. When we was away, he would call them twice or three times a day. When he completed his study of medicine, he travelled to the US. After 12 years away, he forgot about his family. They would tell him over the phone, ‘you have not called since two years; gone are the days when you used to call us twice and thrice a day’. He would say, ‘I have a lot of work, and the expenses are great, and life is busy’. His love was just a love through emotion and not through God. Through our love to God, our love to our family remains constant and does not wane.

I said: how do I make the love of God the first in my life?

He said: you acknowledge and believe that God has to have the first love in your life. Then make a comparison and find out who is first in your life. **Then ask every day**, whenever you

remember that person who is first in your love and care, and say:

**“Lord, make me love you more than so and so
(be him a person or a thing). Please be the first in
my life.”**

Once I asked a young man, “Who is the first in your life.” He said, “I’ll tell you, but do not laugh at me.” I said: “say and I won’t laugh.” He said: “when I was young, I loved the cat more than anyone else. I loved to leave school and play with the cat. When the cat died, I felt very, very sorry, I was depressed for a week; I did not want to eat or drink.” I told him, “I also tell you that you should ask from Him to liberate you from any person or anything.”

Every one of us has his “cat”; a loved one (father or friend ...) or something (money, fame, work, Internet, games ...). First, determine what it is. Begin and ask and keep asking that God becomes first in your life. This stage of comparisons will take a while until you feel concrete results. Retail prayer is easy and you could start it and talk to God in all your ways. You could get used rather quickly to praying with a bare face. But for God to become first in your life, it will take time, maybe months, depending on how serious you are. So, whenever you find

yourself thinking of that person or thing, ask to love God more than him/her/it. When God becomes first in your life, you will have reached what is called spiritual stability.

I said: what else, father?

He said: it is enough today to remember that there are:

Three principles in spiritual life:

- Spiritual life is a path and not a step, a life not a moment
- There are two types of sins: sins committed willingly that require humbling of oneself, and sins committed unwillingly that require hope (the story of military police)



- The Lord Jesus has two ways of dealing: he loves sinners (so, do not despair), and rebukes Pharisees (do not justify)

In order to acquire the love of God:

- Talk to God in retail not in wholesale.
- Interact with God with a bare face.

- Make comparisons.

Know, my son, that this is practical not theoretical. If you just listen to it or read it, you will not benefit or progress. You have to do it, try it; consider it a new experiment in your spiritual life. This is the first step in the ladder of spiritual life. If you want to accomplish a full result, you have to keep up, consistently, by reviewing every week against the preceding ones. Then you take a new topic (or read the following part).

I said: I am ready to sit with you for a whole week until we are done.

He said: no, my son, these are practical matters that have to be tried, then we could talk about what follows (which is controlling our thoughts), so that what we just discussed would not become mere talk. And do not forget the “Good Morning” set.

I said: what is the “Good Morning” set?

He said: when you wash your face, say “Lord make me love You, make me accept Your love, make me live with You.”

St. Isaac says “the power of love is not in its quantity but in its continuity”. Every day you constantly keep saying those prayers, God has to respond, and we depend here on the

insistence. If you love God, you will hate sin, become liberated, and testify to Him because He will be with you.

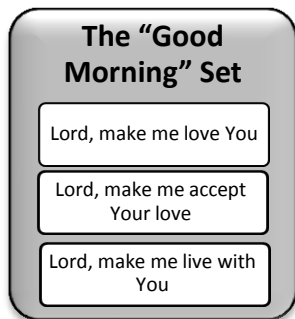
I said: this is quite easy.

He said: beginning will not be enough. You have to continue every day, and God will help you

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