

INTRODUCTION



This booklet is about the “nuts and bolts” of daily spirituality. You won’t find a booklet that presents more simply and concretely what you have to do to grow to that fullness of life that is the perfection of love. This is ground-level.

At the same time, you will not find many booklets that will take you as deeply into the mystery of living the Christian life as this one does.

Christian life is a mystery: the mystery of sharing in the divine life of God. You can’t really experience Christianity until you have some awareness of living on the level of God. And this is an experience you keep growing into all of your life.

Mystery is the name of the game. A mystery is “a truth that invites endless exploration.” God is a mystery; you don’t know God until you get some idea of the mystery of what and who he is.

So, yes, this booklet will take you into mystery. But it will do it so easily, so simply, that it won’t hurt at all.

1 | Growing Closer to God

To grow into deeper levels of intimacy with God, we need to know different ways of praying. Praying is all about loving, which depends on knowing. Prayer is endless exploration into the mystery of God and determining what kind of relationship we want to have with God. Do we want to explore what he thinks about things? Do we want to enter into a more personal relationship with him by reading and thinking about the words he spoke (and is still speaking to us) in the Gospels? Or do we just want to learn his rules and leave it at that? Which will it be?

The levels of intimacy with God correspond to the levels of intimacy we have with people. It is very simple. There are five levels and ways of praying that parallel five different ways we communicate with people. Here they are.

1. Just Words
2. Just Information
3. Dealing with Opinions
4. Expressing Emotions
5. Sharing “Peak Experiences”

2 | Just Words

The first degree of intimacy is the level of relationship we have with people we only talk to in clichés, “pat phrases.” We pass someone in the hall or on the street and say, “Hi! How you doin’?”

When we say this, we aren’t really asking how the person is doing. Nor do we care. If he or she started to tell us, we would get impatient. We aren’t paying attention to what the words mean. We are just using them to say that we notice the other person is there.

This is the level of intimacy we have with God when we say vocal prayers without really paying attention or meaning what we say. For example, we make the Sign of the Cross as if we were brushing flies off our face; or we rattle off “Ourfatherwhoartinheavenhallowedbethyname...” All we are really doing when we “say our prayers” like this is acknowledging that God exists. If this is our only level of communication with God, it isn’t much. Still, it is better than nothing.

So yes, say your prayers. But make them more than pat phrases. Try to pay attention to the words and grow into meaning personally what they say.

3 | Just Information

The second level of intimacy is the relationship we have with people with whom we share information. We ask a coworker which team won the ball game, or an older person to tell us about World War II, or we ask directions from a stranger on the street. Even this establishes a kind of relationship, expresses a certain trust.

We get on this level with God when we want to know more about him. We enjoy learning interesting facts about the life and times of Jesus. Or, going deeper, we study theology for “academic knowledge”—or even to teach or preach to others in an educational way, without necessarily revealing any personal relationship with God on our part or calling for it from others.

There are certain prayers we say, or can say, that mainly just remind us of what the church teaches—the Profession of Faith at Mass, for example—without any sense at all of declaring our personal choice to believe. Don’t knock this. If we knew more about Jesus, we would love him more. If we knew more about what the church teaches, we would appreciate our religion more.

4 | Dealing with Opinions

On the third level of intimacy, we share opinions with others. This is to reveal something of a more personal nature. To ask someone's opinion, or to share our own, is a significant step into deeper personal relationship. It is not to be taken for granted.

When we accept to share our opinions with others, and invite others to share their opinions with us, we have made a great step forward in personal relationship and intimacy. We make this same great step forward in our relationship with God when we begin looking into his opinions.

To take Jesus' opinions seriously, we should argue with him. We let God share his opinions with us when we read and reflect on Scripture with an inquiring mind. When we meditate. Whenever anything Jesus says disturbs our peace, we should ask the Holy Spirit to help us figure it out. Then try. Learning the mind and heart of God is a gradual process. We grow into it. How? We enter into prayer. We meditate.

5 | Expressing Emotions

The fourth level of intimacy—and of prayer—is to express our emotions.

We are not talking here about the emotions we can't hide, as when we blow up at someone and show impatience or anger. We are talking about the act of choosing to reveal to another—or others—not just what we think but what we feel.

To do this—to relinquish control and express physically and visibly what we are feeling—is to enter into another level of intimacy with others. It is to lower our guard, let down some barriers; it is, to some extent, to become “naked” to those we are with.

To communicate with God about emotional issues requires emotional self-expression. If you do not express any emotional response to God, you will not experience any. You will have a very “formal” and “proper” relationship with God as Creator and Lord, but you won't experience passionate love, or ever sense that you care about him.

If you do nothing else, *get in touch with your feelings as you pray.*

6 | Sharing Peak Experiences

We reach the highest level of intimacy in sharing our “peak experiences” with another.

What would we call peak experiences in the spiritual life? And how do they affect our prayer life, our conscious interaction with God? The answer is: “our key mystical experiences.” We need to know: 1. that we have had them; 2. what they are; 3. how we should let them help us on the nuts-and-bolts level of our daily dealings with God.

To know whether God is speaking to us now, we compare what we are experiencing now to the way God communicated with us in those special, key moments when we clearly recognized his voice.

We were made for communication with God. That is the purpose and key of our existence. We can communicate with him in different ways and on different levels. Each level brings us into deeper intimacy with him. To simply rest in awareness of who God is and who we are is the deepest level of prayer.

So, get to know God as deeply and passionately as God wants to know you. God calls us to great things, and God trusts us to carry them out!

7 | The WIT Prayer

The first nut and bolt you need in order to put your spiritual life together is to say the WIT prayer every morning—as soon as you wake up, before you even open your eyes—and keep saying it all day long. What is the WIT prayer?

Lord, I give you my body.
Live this day with me,
live this day in me,
live this day through me.

If you like, you can add, “Let me think with your thoughts, and speak with your words, and act as your body on earth.”

Then all day long, before everything you do, keep repeating it: “Lord, do this with me, do this in me, do this through me.” That alone will transform your life. You don’t believe me? Start doing it and see. This prayer will keep you aware of the mystery of your existence. What is that mystery, and why is it so important to stay aware of it?