

De Sales Discussions

***Belonging to God:
A Personal training Guide for
The Deeper, Catholic
Spiritual Life***

by Charles Murphy

The Crossroads Publishing Co., 2004



De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

“practical paths to holiness”

www.oblates.org/dss

dss@oblates.org

General Discussion Guidelines and Hints

A discussion is a group of people engaged in conversation. This is a natural human activity: an interesting, exciting and creative experience. Discussion is a shared pursuit of responsive understanding -- of yourself, others and the material under consideration.

The purpose of a leader is to be a catalyst. He/she is present to help everyone (1) make a thoughtful examination of the meaning of the material to be discussed and the problems it presents, (2) clarify their thinking and feeling about the problems, and (3) decide their individual response. It is not presumed that a leader necessarily knows more about the subject under discussion, but that the person is trained and prepared to lead this discussion and offer this special kind of assistance to the group.

Don't expect pre-packaged or 'right' answers. Neither the leader nor a member of the group will provide a conclusive answer at the end of the discussion. Each of you will try to find personally satisfying answers; your pursuit of answers may continue long after any particular discussion period ends. The discussion provides information and deepened understanding, but the real answers will be your personal response to life and the world.

What Happens Before the Discussion?

Read over the text selection at least once and preferably twice, first for general comprehension and second for attention to specifics. On the second reading, underline words and phrases you consider important, and make notes in the margins of anything you did not understand; questions you would like to ask your group, and examples or applications that occur to you; What important ideas does it convey? How? Do these ideas conflict with other ideas or feelings you have? Are problem situations presented? How would you behave in such situations? Why?

What can I do to participate well in the discussion?

- Be committed and involved in the group.
- Treat others in the group with support and respect, even if you disagree with their views.
- Express support and agreement with others when appropriate.

- Be mindful of your nonverbal communication and behavior when you are not speaking
- Stick to the point.
- Say it in the group (not before or after to a few friends).
- Respect the confidentiality of others' disclosures.
- Make the meetings. It's difficult to re-create the discussion experience for you, and the group suffers from your absence and input when you're not there.
- Stay on the subject. Speak about the text, your reactions and others' responses.
- Speak to the entire group, not just one person.
- Seek your own understanding. Don't accept another's view as your own unless it makes sense to you.
- Be sure you understand what another is saying. This is especially true when you disagree with him or her.

(Adapted from E. W. Flynn and J. F. La Faso, Group Discussion as Learning Process: a Source book. Paulist Press, 1972)

**A Discussion Group on
Belonging to God:
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After you have read each section,

- 1) What touched you in that section?
- 2) What are the most important points, feelings, truths that you want to live, to incorporate in your own life?
- 3) Is this book affirming some things that you already believe?
- 4) Is this book challenging some things that you already believe?
- 5) Is this book causing you to reflect upon things in a new way?

4. How do I understand “belonging to God”?

5. How do I understand “holiness” as a “divine gift that brings with it a human task”?

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Chapter 1: Spirituality

1. How do I understand “love for each other as God’s gift and a window into the immensity of God’s love them”?

2. How do I understanding my recognizing that God is in my heart?

3. How do I understand the influence of the crises in St. Francois’ life on his spiritual learning?

4. How do I understand St. Francois' approach to living as "devout humanism"?

5. How do I understand "listen deeply to your heart and trust what it says"?

6. How do I understand "commit your heart firmly to God"?

7. Do I understand “strive gently for perfect freedom of heart”?

8. How do I understand “belong joyfully to God in the midst of all you do”?

9. How do I understand “do each day’s ordinary things with great love”?

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Chapter 2: Seeking a Spiritual Guide

1. How do I understand “obedience” to a spiritual director?
2. How do I understand “candor” and “honesty” in spiritual direction?
3. How do I understand the qualities of a good spiritual guide?
4. What is Spiritual Direction?

5. How do I understand the purpose of spiritual direction?

6. How do I understand the value of “spiritual” friends?

7. How do I understand the Holy Spirit as the “real” spiritual director?

8. How do I understand the question: “How is my heart”?

9. How do I understand the question: “Am I holding my heart in my hands”?

10. How do I understand St. Francois' advice on handling anger?

11. How do I appreciate his advice on "meekness"?

12. How do I understand "loving my abjections"?

13. How do I understand the value of "the particular examen"?

14. How do I appreciate the suggestions for finding a spiritual director?

5. How do I appreciate St. Francois' advice to preserve the basic value rather than the specific practices?

6. How do I appreciate the value of faithfulness rather than success?

7. How do I appreciate Cardinal Cooke's rule of life?

8. How should I start my design?

9. How do I appreciate the value of regularity in a plan of life?

10. How do I appreciate Newman's practical list of daily activities?

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Chapter 4: The Goal of the Spiritual Life: Falling in Love with God

1. How do I appreciate “wherever and whenever we know genuine love, we are becoming acquainted with God”?

2. How do I appreciate Aaron’s experience of God?

3. How do I appreciate Ste. Marguerite Marie’s experience of God’s love?

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Chapter 5: Changing

1. How do I appreciate the author's six spiritual practices?

2. How do I appreciate conversion as turning from lesser love and letting my heart rest in God?

3. How can I know that I have been converted to a life of personal devotion?

4. How do I appreciate Augustine's need to find "the God of my hearts"?

5. How do I appreciate Ignatius' experience of conversion?

6. How do I understand applying these spiritual principles?

7. How do I understand St. Francois' ten meditations as preparation for a "general confession"?

8. How do I understand the purpose of a “general confession”?

9. What am I encouraged to do after a “general confession”?

10. How do I appreciate Psalm 139?

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Chapter 6: Praying

1. How do I understand the importance of praying?
2. How do I appreciate the difference between “saying prayers” and “praying”?
3. How do I appreciate St. Teresa’s goal in prayer?
4. How do I understand St. Teresa’s four ways of praying?

5. How do I understand the seven “rooms” of St. Teresa’s Interior Castle?

6. How do I understand God’s drawing me to the ultimate “room”?

7. How does this experience change my life?

8. How do the examples offered strike my heart?

9. How do I appreciate applying these principles to prayer?

10. How can I best pass from prayer to the activities of my day?

11. How do I appreciate St. Francois' method for meditating?

4. How do I understand the notion of “Christian friendship”?

5. How can I apply these principles to loving?

6. Why am I encouraged to practice the small virtues?

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Chapter 8: Working

1. How do I understand the layperson's exercise of the three-fold messianic offices of Christ?

2. How do I understand my human contribution to the building of God's Kingdom?

3. How do I understand Pope John Paul II's "gospel of work"?

4. How do I understand the phrase "find yourself doing God's work"?

5. What can I learn from the ideas of St. Francois about work?

6. How do I appreciate applying these principles to work?

7. How do I understand St. Francois' advice: "little by little"?

8. How do I appreciate the author's four suggestions for keeping my work aligned with God's?

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Chapter 9: Eating

1. How do I understand the spiritual significance of eating?
2. How do I understand the values of eating?
3. How do I appreciate St. Francois' attitude toward food and eating?
4. How do I appreciate applying these principles to eating?

5. How do I appreciate the discipline of Fasting?

6. How do I appreciate the Mass (Eucharist)?

7. How do I appreciate “Go, it is sent forth”?

4. How do I appreciate St. Francois' ideas on anxiety and sadness?

5. How do I appreciate Psalm 22?

6. How do I appreciate the value of an annual retreat?

7. How do I appreciate St. Francois' suggestions for "exercises" during the retreat?

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Conclusion

1. How do I appreciate the aspects of John XXIII's life that led him to holiness?

2. What are the Salesian influences on the holiness of John XXIII?

3. How do I appreciate the great task of any Christian?

Evaluation
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1. In broad strokes, my experience of this discussion program was

Poor 2 Good 4 Excellent

2. What I learned during this discussion series was...

Not useful 2 Useful 4 Very Useful

3. During this discussion program, I really liked...

4. I would have enjoyed the discussion program more if...

5. Would you like to see a program like this to continue? If so, what Salesian topics or works would you like to explore?

6. Would you suggest any changes to the time, duration, and frequency of the discussion group?

Your Name _____ Date _____

Name of Parish/School/Ministry _____