

# **De Sales Discussions**

***Living Love:  
A Modern Edition of the  
Treatise on the Love of God***

by Bernard Bangley

Published by



***De Sales***

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

*“practical paths to holiness”*

[www.oblates.org/dss](http://www.oblates.org/dss)

[dss@oblates.org](mailto:dss@oblates.org)

**A Discussion Group on the  
Living Love:  
A Modern Edition of the Treatise on the Love of God**

**Based upon the  
*Treatise on the Love of God*  
By Francis de Sales**

**by Bernard Bangley**

Bernard Bangley provides us with a refreshingly new and contemporary presentation of the *Treatise on the Love of God* that is also strikingly faithful to the spirit and intention of St. Francis de Sales. We hope that Bangley's effort will lead you to read the *Treatise on the Love of God* in its entirety.

We have provided you with a number of questions for each section. We suggest that you review the questions before reading each chapter in order to glean some of the suggested highlights from each section.

Avoid feeling constrained to address all the questions for each chapter in one session. You (and your group) may choose to consider only a few questions in one session. You could also spread out the questions for each chapter over several sessions.

After you have read each section, ask yourself...

- 1) What touched you in that section?
- 2) What are the most important points, feelings, truths that you want to hold on to, to incorporate in your own life?
- 3) Is he affirming values or teachings that you already believe?
- 4) Is he challenging something that you presently believe?

## **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 leaders is to be a catalyst. They are 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 leaders necessarily know more about the subject under discussion, but that they are 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  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 1**

**Our Natural Tendency to Love God**

1. Since I am made “in the image of God,” how do I find myself attracted to God?

2. How do I respond to my natural tendency to seek God?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 2**

**How God in Christ inspires Us to Love**

1. Do I believe that God is more than all the attributes I can identify with God?

2. "God's desire to communicate with his creation reaches its peak in Christ." How do I appropriate this mystery of unity?

3. How do I receive the abundance of God's saving grace for me?

4. Do I appreciate the variety of gifts found in the Church? How do I use my gifts to add beauty to the garden of the Church?

5. Have I heard God knocking on the door of my heart to proclaim God's loving me? Have I opened the door?

6. Has my faith brought with it the heat of divine love? How have I responded?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 3**

**Levels of Union with God**

1. How can I love God more each day?

2. How has God come to my aid when I sin?

3. Do I appreciate that God desires me to be perfectly united to God in heaven?  
How do I experience and/or demonstrate that?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 4**

**Risks of Loss**

1. Have other things caught my attention so that I have forsaken my love for God?

2. Do I realize how easily I can lose God's love?

3. Do I listen to God's inspirations and respond to them?

4. Do I realize that loving God is different from loving to love God? What is the distinction?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 5**

**Two Dimensions of Holy Love**

1. Do I find myself responding cheerfully to the goodness I see in God by desiring to please God (compliant love)?

2. Does compassion rise from my love of God?

3. Do I find myself drawn to praise the goodness and love of God (beneficent love)?

4. Do I find myself joining all creation in praising God?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 6**

**Contemplation and Meditation – Love in Prayer**

1. Is my prayer an intimate conversation with God?
2. How do I understand the nature of prayer and mystical theology?
3. What does it mean for me to understand that the purpose of meditation is love, not understanding?

4. How do I understand that meditation moves to contemplation?

5. How well do I understand that contemplative affection unites all in God?

6. How might be God calling me to a contemplative life?

7. How have I experienced the two levels of prayer in the state of recollection?

8. Have I experienced “spiritual tranquility” in my prayer?

9. Do I create hindrances in my quiet prayer?

10. What do I find the image of the “statue in the niche” telling me about my prayer?

11. How do I understand “the outflowing of the soul to God”?

12. How has divine love wounded me?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 7**

**Prayer Brings Us Close to God**

1. Do I find my heart immersed more deeply in God? How, or how not?

2. Do I preserve a sacred awareness of God's presence?

3. Do I find myself being drawn into closer union with God (rapture/ecstasy)?

4. Do I use short aspirations from my heart to unite myself with God during the day? How might I be able to use them?

5. Do I understand the different kinds of sacred ecstasy? Do I appreciate the dangers associated with them?

6. Do I seek extraordinary spiritual experiences or do I seek to love?

7. Do I live for my Savior who died for me? How can I do that?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 8**

**Conformity with God's Will**

1. Do I find that, when I truly love God, I desire to act in a more God-like manner?

2. Do I find that loving God leads me to become more obedient to God's will for me?

3. How does God respect my free will?

4. Do I experience God's commandments as expressions of God's love for me?

5. Do I practice lovingly the counsels of the Gospels according to my state in life? How can I do that?

6. Do I seek to understand God's desires for me and follow them eagerly?

7. Have I ever passed up an opportunity to do something good because I was looking for something 'better'?

8. How are peace and tranquility signs of true inspirations?

9. Do I seek to be humble and obedient in following inspirations?

10. Do I tend to fret over small inspirations?

11. Once I have taken steps to discern the goodness of an inspiration, do I confidently act on it? And stay with it?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 9**

**Holy Indifference**

1. Do I believe that God's providence is expressed in the events of my day?  
What does that mean for me?

2. How do I understand "genuine love of God welcomes both consolations and afflictions"?

3. Do I understand the difference between resignation and holy indifference in accepting divine will? How would I explain that?

4. How do I exhibit holy indifference when my efforts fail?

5. How does it help me to understand that while good efforts are in my control, the ultimate results may not be?

6. How does the image of “the deaf lute player” say to me?

7. Do I love the God of consolation, or the consolations of God? What difference does this make in my prayer and daily living?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 10**

**The Importance and Value of Loving God**

1. How do I connect love of God and love of self and neighbor? How?

2. How can zeal lead to jealousy and envy?

3. How can God call himself “a jealous God”?

4. How might I practice divine jealousy with zeal?

5. Why does zeal need careful guidance? Is my zeal guided?

6. Do I understand the false connection between zeal and anger?

7. How do I understand the loving sacrifice of Jesus for me?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 11**

**The Love of God Inspires Other Virtues**

1. How does the love of God sanctify virtues?

2. How would I explain how love adds value to all my actions?

3. "God has sown the seeds of every virtue in our hearts." How have these seeds grown in my heart?

4. How does divine love transform a sinner? How can it transform me?

5. How does the fruit of the Spirit – love – show itself in my life?

6. “There is no excuse for not being gracious, accommodating, and considerate of others.” Why is this so? Do I agree or disagree?

**A Discussion Group on  
*Living Love*  
by Bernard Bangley  
Chapter 12**

**Guidance for Practicing Divine Love**

1. "Spiritual hunger... is the root of all good." Do I have a spiritual hunger?

2. What can distract me from the love of God?

3. How can my worldly cares and responsibilities fit with the love of God?

4. "We are not always asked to perform great works for God, but every moment we may do little ones with much excellent love." How does this apply to my daily living?

5. How might an annual retreat help me to grow?

6. How can short, spontaneous prayers influence my spiritual growth?

7. Do I believe that Jesus knows me by name and lovingly died for my sins?

8. Do I spend time in prayer at Calvary, believing that “the passion and death of our Lord is the sweetest and most powerful motivator that can affect our hearts”?

9. “Live Jesus, whom I love!” How might this be the song of my heart each day?

**Evaluation**  
**A Discussion Group on**  
***Living Love***  
**by Bernard Bangley**

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 \_\_\_\_\_