

De Sales Discussions

LIVE JESUS!

Wisdom from
Francis de Sales & Jane de Chantal

Edited by Louise Perrotta
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**A Discussion Group on
LIVE JESUS!**

**Wisdom from
Francis De Sales
&
Jane de Chantal**

Edited by Louise Perrotta

Louise Perrotta provides us with a list of the sources from which she draws in her introduction to LIVE JESUS! Wisdom from St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. In the chapters that follow, she arranges some selected writings from both of these saints under the heading of eleven general themes, which also provide the individual chapters for this collection of the varied and practical wisdom of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal.

This book provides a wonderful addition to the number of Salesian resources already available in the English language. Louise Perrotta gives us a wonderful gift in collating some selected writings from both Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal, providing sound advice for how we can live a Christ-centered life precisely in the midst of our busy lives. In the words of Jacques Maritain, their collective wisdom "...shows the marvelous adaptability of the progress of love penetrating every state of life. I do not mean in spite of the temporal commitments of the Christian in the world: I mean because of these very obligations themselves." (The Spirit of Love: C. F. Kelley, 1951)

Read each chapter with an eye to the questions that we have provided in this De Sales Discussions. In addition, we would suggest that you reflect upon the general questions below after you have read each chapter:

- 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 what you already believe?
- 4) Is he challenging something that you 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 the book
LIVE JESUS!
Wisdom from Francis de Sales & Jane de Chantal
Chapter 1: Pages 9 - 21

1. Why did some people take a dim view upon the canonization of Francis de Sales?

2. Describe the world into which Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal were born. How did the world then differ from the world today? In what ways might their times be similar to our own?

3. How would you describe Francis de Sales' tenure as Bishop of Geneva? How would you characterize his approach to the people of his diocese?

4. How would you describe the period of Jane de Chantal's marriage and widowhood?

5. What were the circumstances surrounding the beginning of the friendship between Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales?

6. How did Jane de Chantal provide for the care of her children even as she established the Visitation Order?

7. What was it is about Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal that people found attractive in their day? What it is about Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal that people find attractive in our own day?

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Chapter 2: Pages 23 - 30

1. For what do human beings have a natural tendency, according to Francis de Sales? How do we manifest this?

2. How does God respond to us when we are slow to grow?

3. Consider the image of the woman and cradle. How does this analogy describe God's love for us?

4. How can we consciously be aware of God's presence and respond to God's presence day in, day out?

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Chapter 3: Pages 31 - 41

1. Explain the image of the father and child. How would you apply it to your own life?

2. How can self-examination become problematic?

3. In the end, what is the only thing we need? How does your own experience of life compare with this assertion?

4. What does Jane de Chantal mean by the notion of simple self-forgetfulness?

5. What is a good way to deal with temptations?

6. What does Francis de Sales mean when he speaks of “Loving God for Himself”? What analogies does Francis use in describing this?

7. How can we remain focused on God even in the midst of our daily occupations?

8. What was the single aim of Francis de Sales' life? How did he remind himself of this?

A Discussion Group on the book
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Chapter 4: Pages 43 - 52

1. According to Francis de Sales, what is a very common way that we waste our time and energy? In what ways do you struggle with this tendency?

2. All vocations have their share of headaches and heartaches. Still, for all this, how are we invited to embrace God's will? Why is this important to us? How is this important to others?

3. Jane de Chantal offers some advice for dealing with annoying people. What does she suggest? How might you apply it to your own life?

4. What does it mean to obey God? How does this get played out in real life?

5. What are five ways to achieve and experience contentment?

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Chapter 5: Pages 53 - 64

1. What is a common mistake of people who are striving for perfection?

2. What should be our chief care or desire according to Jane de Chantal?

3. Second only to sin, what is the greatest evil that can befall us? What remedy does Francis de Sales suggest?

4. What does it mean to carry your soul in your hand? What are some practical ways to do this?

5. Why is it important to live a humble and gentle life? What analogies does Francis de Sales use to describe this?

6. According to Jane de Chantal, how should we deal with powerful emotions?

7. What is a great way to keep life (and the people/things in it) in perspective?”

8. Describe the Salesian notion of “gentle violence”? What are your thoughts, feelings and/or reactions to this notion?

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Chapter 6: Pages 65 - 77

1. What does it mean to “abandon yourself” to God? How can you do this in your own life?

2. How should we deal with physical suffering?

3. How should we use the grace that God offers us?

4. What does Francis mean by the maxim, “Ask for Nothing; Refuse Nothing”?
How can you apply or live this in your own situation?

5. How does God provide for us?

6. Why is it important to reduce the impact of fear in our lives?

7. How can hope in the next life help us to live more fully in this life?

8. What is the “hidden reality” of which Jane de Chantal writes?

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Chapter 7: Pages 79 - 89

1. What is the difference – or relationship – between faith and feelings?

2. Even when we have no feeling for God or the things of God, how should we live? Why is this important?

3. How should we deal with distractions?

4. How should we respond when we do not experience consolations in prayer?
How should we respond when we feel nothing in prayer?

5. Describe Jane de Chantal's analogy of the candle. How might it speak to you at this point in your life?

6. How can we put everything to good use?

7. How should we deal with feelings of abandonment?

8. What does it mean to “Imitate Christ”? How can I do this in the midst of my busy, daily life?

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Chapter 8: Pages 91 - 103

1. Why does Francis de Sales suggest that we need to endure our imperfections patiently? Do you think this is good advice? Why, or why not?

2. Why does Jane de Chantal believe that it is necessary to “really know ourselves”? How do we accomplish this?

3. Explain the following paradox: “I can do nothing; I can do everything.”

4. What is the difference between true and false humility?

5. “Reality Check.” What does this mean for you at this point in your life?

6. Why is it important to “be at peace with our imperfections”? Are you at “peace” with yours?

7. What does Jane de Chantal mean when she speaks about “clothing yourself with God’s perfection”? What point is she trying to make?

8. In the opinion of Francis de Sales, what is the purpose of pain? How do you react/respond to this notion?

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Chapter 9: Pages 105 - 115

1. What are the three “little virtues” named by Francis de Sales? What other virtues might you add to his list?

2. How does “great love transform small deeds”? How can you apply this maxim in your own life?

3. How successful are you in your efforts to “see God in the ordinary”?

4. What is the “Little Way to Greatness”?

5. What does Francis mean when he writes: “Let us be firm on our way: lower but safer, less excellent but more suited to our...littleness”?

6. Jane de Chantal claims that “union with God takes place through small but frequent movements.” Can you relate to this in your own life?

7. In the opinion of Francis de Sales, why are small temptations at least as dangerous (if not more so) than great temptations?

8. How would you describe or share Francis de Sales’ “common sense for travelers” with others?

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Chapter 10: Pages 117 - 129

1. How would you describe Jane de Chantal's exhortation on "The Great Commandment"?

2. According to Francis de Sales, why should you love your neighbor?

3. According to Jane de Chantal, how should you demonstrate your love for others?

4. How can speech become a sin against love?

5. Why are holy and sacred friendships so important to the spiritual life? Do you have such a friendship?

6. According to Francis de Sales, how can we unite ourselves with our neighbors?

7. How does Jane de Chantal describe the ways in which Francis de Sales embodied the love of God and neighbor? How do you stack up against her description?

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Chapter 11: Pages 131 - 138

1. According to Francis de Sales, where does devotion need to begin?

2. What does Jane de Chantal mean when she speaks of “finding...losing yourself in God”?

3. What does it mean, practically, to “live in the Spirit”?

4. What is the great method of mental prayer? What are three conditions necessary to pray this way?

5. What does Francis de Sales mean by the notion of “digesting Jesus Christ”?

6. What is the “name” that really matters? Why is this important?

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 _____