For Personal Reflection

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1. How much serenity do I experience at this point in my life?
2. What are the areas of my life in which I am experiencing the greatest need for serenity?
3. Of the five steps that Francis de Sales offers, which one do I find most attractive? Why?
4. Of the five steps that Francis de Sales offers, which do I find most challenging? Why?
5. Do I make time and space for prayer—even the simplest forms of prayer—during an average day?
6. What temptations in my life sorely try my attempts to practice serenity?
7. What practices or attitudes do I find most helpful in my attempts to be even-tempered?

Further Reading

Introduction to the Devout Life: St. Francis de Sales. Various editions. In its entirety

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Five Steps...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

...to Spiritual Serenity

Serenity, composure, equanimity—these nouns describe the state of a person who is calm, or centered, and who is not easily agitated. *The American Heritage Dictionary* of the English Language defines it as "the quality of being calm and even-tempered; having composure," which comes from the Latin for *even-tempered* or *impartial*.

The ability to remain centered or even-tempered in the midst of the demands and challenges of every day life is a tremendously important quality...and, frequently enough, a highly elusive one.

While there is no easy or painless way to acquire this quality, St, Francis de Sales offers us a five-step program that can increase our ability to practice—and experience—serenity.

"Be on the watch for those temptations that weaken our resistance to sin and/or dissuade us from doing good…"

Step One. Choose to live a life of devotion. Make a conscious decision to spend each day doing what is right and good. Do what is right and good readily, diligently and frequently. St. Francis de Sales writes: "True devotion perfects all things. Every vocation becomes more agreeable when united with true devotion. Care of one's family becomes more peaceable, love of husband or wife more sincere, service to one's employer more faithful, and every type of employment or endeavor more pleasant and agreeable."

Step Two. Prayer. Prayer helps us to remain centered. Prayer helps us to remain anchored. Prayer helps us to deal with what happens around us while avoiding agitation inside us.

"Develop, practice and strengthen those habits that support your resolve to live a life of devotion."

Make time for personal prayer. Practice the awareness of the presence of God. Prepare your day: anticipate all that you must accomplish or might encounter today. Make an examination of conscience twice a day: once around noon, the second in early evening. Reflect on Scripture or other spiritual reading.

As part of a larger commitment to prayer, make use of the Sacraments: Eucharist, Reconciliation and, when appropriate, Anointing. Seek the grace and courage you need to lead a life of serenity in the midst of life's activities.

Step Three. Practice virtue. Develop, practice and strengthen those habits that support your resolve to live a life of devotion. In the Salesian tradition, some of the more important virtues include: flexibility/adaptability; patience; humility; gentleness; truthfulness; diligence; poverty; chastity; obedience; being faithful to all the demands and responsibilities of life, both great and small.

Step Four. Turn away from sin. Turn away from those vices and values that undermine our desire to lead a life of devotion.

Just as important: resist temptation. Be on the watch for those temptations that weaken our resistance to sin and/or dissuade us from doing what is good. Two of the most dangerous of 'the usual suspects' are anxiety and sorrow.

Francis de Sales observed: "These temptations to anger, suspicion, jealousy, envy, fond love, frivolity, vanity, affectation manipulation and evil thoughts attack even the most devout and resolute. We must fully prepare ourselves for combat. I say that while we must always be ready to fight well and valiantly against great temptations if they come, we must in the meantime diligently defend ourselves against attacks that seem small or weak."

"Prayer helps us to remain centered. Prayer helps us to remain anchored...while avoiding agitation."

Step Five. Rest, Retreat, Renewal. Take/make opportunities for a spiritual "time out" in the midst of each day's activities. Where possible, make an actual retreat every year. Take time, make space to examine your progress on the road to devotion. Seek forgiveness for your failings; give thanks for your successes. Above all, find ways to remind you of the things in life that really matter...and that lead to serenity in the hereafter!