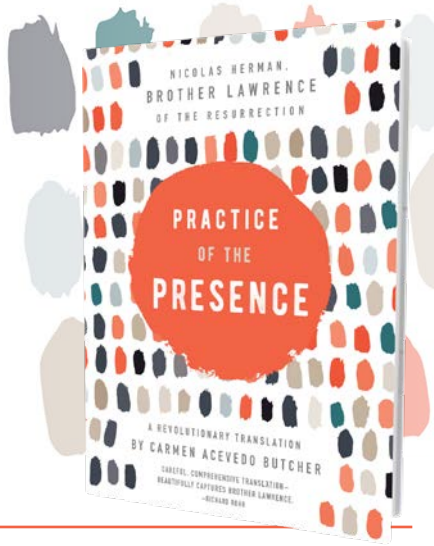
PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE

A REVOLUTIONARY TRANSLATION

BY CARMEN ACEVEDO BUTCHER

The Complete Teachings of **NICOLAS HERMAN, BROTHER LAWRENCE OF THE RESURRECTION**

Study Guide by **CARMEN ACEVEDO BUTCHER**



PRACTICES AND PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION, CONVERSATION, AND EMBODIMENT

How to Use This Guide

This guide honors the down-to-earth, kind spirit of Nicolas Herman, Brother Lawrence. It came to be when Carmen's translation was released into our chaotic world and readers began asking, "Is there a study guide?" They wanted to gather with it—get to know each other, themselves, the friar, and his simple practice better. You can also use the guide in personal times of quiet. Like the friar's life and Carmen's translation of his teachings, it has an embodied approach, grounded in practice. It also offers you a selection of open-ended questions and prompts for conversations and reflections.

This guide has eight short sections. The opening one, New Beginning, and the last one, Joyful Lagniappe, help you explore the friar's life, perspective, and themes. They frame six middle sections that walk you through the friar's wisdom, following the flow in Carmen's translation. Subtitles are quotes Carmen adapted to summarize each section:

1. New Beginning: How do you see?
2. Spiritual Maxims: Work gently
3. Letters: Return to yourself
4. Conversations: Do ordinary exercises of love and gratitude
5. The Heart of Brother Lawrence: Act deliberately and mindfully
6. Profile: Be gentle and show great kindness
7. Last Words: Cultivate hope
8. Joyful Lagniappe: Don't rush

Each section starts with a 5-minute practice for group and/or personal use. It's followed by questions / reflections / conversation starters. Then there's another 5-minute practice. Each section ends with a To-Go reflection for further contemplation.

Brother Lawrence practiced a "methodless method" of prayer by adapting teachings from his ancestors to best suit his life. You're invited to personalize this guide however best helps you. Here are a few of many ways: Each practice can be used as a guided exercise for a gathering, or individually. To end gatherings, you might read the To-Go reflections, and reflect on these between meetings. They might spark a group conversation, or a meditative writing. You may also add your favorite scripture, poem, quote, or passage to a practice, for contemplation. You're given a choice of prompts—not every prompt must be responded to during community gatherings or personal time.

May this guide and the wise friar's *Practice of the Presence* help you and your friends strengthen your community. May it deepen your self-compassion and help you cherish your sacred body more, as the friar did his. May you feel more at home with your own self. May you become more practiced at sustaining the presence, and more actively compassionate. May it increase your hope. And if you are reading the book and guide on your own, imagine your larger community, holding them in your heart with a sense of joy and support as you read and reflect.

1. New Beginning: How do you see?

Practice:

Look again at *Practice of the Presence* in Carmen Acevedo Butcher's translation, print or digital. *With new eyes*. Don't look *for* anything. Look *at* what's there. Be curious. What do its paint-daubed cover and size invite you to consider? Flip through the first fifty-two pages (up through page 36, where the translation starts). Look open-eyed at these. What do you notice that makes you wonder? Do questions come to mind? If helpful, write observations and questions down to explore later or to bring up in a community conversation.

Questions to explore:

- What connection might I find between this book of everyday spirituality and the translator's dedication to the New York City nonprofit Women's Prison Association?
- While some readers skip early pages in a book, all sorts of hidden clues and insights are found in these opening pages. What is one thing you learned from the Translator's Personal Note, Introduction, and/or Translator's Note that you find worthy of further discussion for spiritual formation?
- What did you learn about Brother Lawrence that you didn't know before and that makes you feel he might be an accessible teacher?
- Carmen's new translation of this spiritual classic offers the complete teachings of Brother Lawrence for the first time to a wide-ranging audience, and it has been praised for its accuracy and inclusive language. Why do you think being mindful of our language use in everyday life is considered by some an essential spiritual practice?

Practice:

As a community, sit together and get comfortable. If it helps you to close your eyes, you may, or just let your gaze soften or lower it. Feel your feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, and picture roots coming down from your feet into the earth. Remember the sky above you. What a lovingly built home. Take several deep, slow breaths. Simply sit in that silence, together. Feel an open sense of gratitude for being alive and in community. If you are reading the book on your own and are not part of a group at the moment, consider

this practice, imagining your larger community and holding them and your ancestors in your heart with a sense of encouragement and love.

To-Go reflection:

"How we see is what we see."

—RICHARD ROHR

2. Spiritual Maxims: Work gently

Practice:

Pause. Meditate on words from Brother Lawrence's Spiritual Maxims, which open Carmen's translation: "Everything is possible for those who believe, even more for those who hope, still more for those who love, and most of all for those who practice and persevere in these three powerful paths" (page 46). Free-associate. What comes to mind when you read these? If helpful, write it down to reflect on or to bring up in a discussion.

Questions to explore:

- Which of the friar's seven brief sections in Spiritual Maxims are you most drawn to and why: "Everything Is Possible," "Work Gently," "Humble and Authentic," "Je Ne Sais Quoi," "Like a Straw Fire," "How to Practice," or "Faith, Hope, Love"?
- In "Work Gently" (pages 47–49), how does Brother Lawrence describe the practice of the presence? Which of his descriptions and which metaphors that he uses for his portable prayer practice are most helpful to you here?
- How might the practice of the presence gradually make us less self-preoccupied, as the friar says in "Work Gently": "And this practice dissolves gradually, and almost unconsciously, the self-preoccupation that is such a part of human nature" (page 48 at 4).
- The friar often calls the practice of the presence "easy," but here he says it "seems hard" (page 47 at 4). Is that comment relatable to you, and if so, how?
- Why is it important that the friar reminds us to "work gently" (page 48 at 3)?
- Have you ever experienced what the friar describes as "an *I don't know what*, a *je ne sais quoi* of the soul" (page 51 at 3)? If so, when?
- In "How to Practice," Brother Lawrence encourages the use of interior words to practice the presence: "My God, I am all yours." "God of love, I love you with all my heart." "Love, create in me a new heart." And he adds: "Or any other phrases love produces on the spot" (page 54 at 4). Do you find that advice helpful?
- What comes to mind when you read of the "simple awareness" the friar describes on page 54 at 5 and page 56 at 4?
- If you want the joy of seeing the friar's original 1692 Spiritual Maxims, copy and paste into an online search engine (with no quotation marks): "maximes spirituelles bibliotheque nationale de France gallica." Go to page 77. Or use this link, which Carmen customized for you: https://bit.ly/spiritualmaxims. What does it mean that the friar's wisdom went through so many forms in five

centuries: from quill-pen handwritten, to hand-typeset, to printed with modern technology, to pixelated ebooks?

Practice:

Brother Lawrence wrote with a goose quill pen and oakgall ink. In a moment of private writing, with a pen or pencil and a piece of paper, free-write. Describe briefly—without grammar worries—a moment you felt "a something indescribable, gentle, peaceful, spiritual, respectful, humble, loving, and very simple that carries the soul and nudges her to love" (page 51 at 3). You're not looking for a "right answer," but for *your answer*.

To-Go reflection:

"Show up, or choose to be present. Pay attention to what has heart and meaning. Tell the truth without blame or judgment. Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome."

—ANGELES ARRIEN

3. Letters: Return to yourself

Practice:

In Letter 1, the friar says, "Let us return to ourselves" (page 64). He knows that the ground of our being is Love. One way to return to yourself is through meditative writing. Here you are writing solely for you, just for you to see. Let grammar worries disappear. Briefly describe something about yourself that makes you feel insecure or not good enough—feelings we all have. It could be related to your personality, behavior, abilities, relationships, or any other part of your life. Describe how it makes you feel. Sad? Angry? Embarrassed? Try to be as honest as possible, keeping in mind that no one but you will see this. Then write a brief letter to yourself expressing compassion, acceptance, and understanding for the part of yourself you dislike. As you write, imagine with you someone who loves and accepts you unconditionally for who you are. It can be anyone, past or present. What would that person say to you about this part of yourself?

Questions to explore:

- As Brother Lawrence's letters span the last decade of his life, from age 68 to 77, they share his matured living, thinking, and teaching. How does he describe his practice of the presence in these letters to his friends and others? What does he want to teach them, and you?
- The letters come second in Carmen's translation because they bring us wise Brother Lawrence's voice so clearly. What did you learn from them about his empathetic self that is helpful to you in living your own life?
- How do they express issues resonating with our own (distraction, anxiety, etc.)?
- After marveling at the friar's sixteen surviving letters versus the hundreds surviving from Archbishop François Fénelon (1651–1715), consider: How did the friar's letters bring to life *Practice of the Presence*, and what might that teach you?

- What does he say about suffering in the letters that you find helpful or puzzling?
- What is the most hopeful thing you discovered in his letters? Anything you'd like to share with others?
- In Letter 10, Brother Lawrence writes to a laywoman, describing God: "We cannot put too much trust in such a good and faithful friend who will never let us down in this world or the next" (page 97). This "good and faithful friend" is put very simply, "*un ami si bon et si fidèle*." In Carmen's note here, she reflects on a lunch with a monk in Conyers, Georgia, Father Tom Francis, who said to her: "God is our Friend. That's what most people need to know" (page 96). Consider your image of God, Divinity, Love, the Source of the Source, or however you conceive of Mystery or Ultimate Meaning. Has this changed over the course of your life? Are you satisfied, or do you wish it might deepen or alter in some way?

Practice:

Reread the brief, private letter you wrote earlier. In a private meditation, remind yourself that everyone has things about themselves they don't like, and no one is without flaws, and think on how many other people in the world are struggling with the same thing you are. You're part of this human family. Take a few deep, slow breaths. Say to yourself, *I am safe, I am loved, I am part of this human family*. Put that as an alert in your phone, if you wish, or write it down and put it where you will see it every morning.

To-Go reflection:

"God comes to us disguised as our life."

—PAULA D'ARCY

4. Conversations: Do ordinary exercises of love and gratitude

Practice:

Name your gratitude as a brief meditation. Film director Ava Duvernay posted on Twitter one Thanksgiving: "Thankful for this beating heart. These lungs that feed me oxygen. This mind that holds my memories. Memories that allow me to still experience . . . all the love my dad gave freely, asking nothing in return. This nose I love too. It can smell my Mom's potato dish that she'll make today" (Nov. 25, 2021). Julian of Norwich says we can be thankful for everything: "God does not disdain anything . . . created. Human beings walk upright, and the food we eat is elegantly stored in our body, like money secured in a purse. When the time comes, the body opens, releases what it no longer needs, and is sealed back up again. Just like that!" (translated by Mirabai Starr). Quietly reflect for two minutes on a few things you are truly grateful for in this moment.

Questions to explore:

- When Brother Lawrence and Joseph of Beaufort began these conversations in 1666 at the monastery in Paris, what experiences had the friar already had in life? Of these, how do his so-called failures give us hope for our own lives?

- Do you relate to the "strange and wonderful gift" Brother Lawrence told Joseph he received at age eighteen (page 123)?
- We meditate on the trauma Brother Lawrence experienced as a non-privileged member of French society and as a war veteran, and also on the disability he lived with for five decades, limping painfully from his early twenties on. What do you think that trauma and disability meant to him? How did he respond to it spiritually? How does that have relevance for you and/or for all of us, including in light of the long Covid–impacted world today?
- Brother Lawrence "had the strongest natural aversion to doing kitchen work" (page 127), yet he was assigned to the kitchen for decades, where by practicing the presence "he grew accustomed to doing everything there for the love of God" (page 127). What is one thing or situation in your life that you have a strong dislike for, and how might you practice the presence *with* it?
- "We need faithfulness even in a dry period when it is hard to pray" (page 124), and the friar returned to Love "*come what may*" (page 128). How can we do that?
- Is it helpful to you that Brother Lawrence grounds his lived theology in the reality of human "stumbling" (page 128) rather than in perfectionism, where a person tries to be perfect or good?
- Joseph describes how the friar came back again and again to practicing the presence prayer: "[He] returned in peace to his ordinary exercises of love and gratitude" (page 128). What role does gratitude play in your life, and how could you live out this "returning" in your own everyday life?
- "Overthinking ruins everything" (page 128), the friar said. Do you agree?
- How do you see the many conversations in your life? As sacred? Mundane? Functional?

Practice:

Gently close your eyes or, if you prefer, simply lower your gaze. Feel your

breath rise and fall.

Where is your pain? In your body, psyche, soul? Hold your pain.

Where is the pain of another? Hold their pain.

Where are we connected? Hold our pain.

Notice any tightness around your heart. Let it melt away.

Where is your joy? Cherish your joy.

Where is the joy of another? Cherish their joy.

Where are we connected? Cherish our joy.

May we remember our shared human experience. May we choose awareness of our deep connections. May this inform the way we see and care for each other. May we remember: I am my neighbor and my neighbor is me.

(Adapted from Rev. Dr. Barbara A. Holmes, Center for Action & Contemplation)

To-Go reflection:

"Pay attention. / Be astonished. / Tell about it."

—MARY OLIVER, "INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIVING A LIFE"

5. The Heart of Brother Lawrence: Act deliberately and mindfully

Practice:

We complicate our lives in ways we don't need to. It's human. Simple mindfulness of breath is a healing way to enter into the calmness of this moment. This spaciousness of the numinous now is what Brother Lawrence names "practice of the presence," or simply "presence." Get comfortable, closing your eyes or letting your gaze drop. Breathe in and out a few slow, deep breaths to truly pause. Settle. Then put your attention on your breath, even as you stay aware of your environment. If a distracting thought comes, as they do, gently notice it, without being critical of it or of yourself. Return your attention to how you're breathing in and out. In this practice, thoughts come and go, and the purpose is to return to the breath, rather than evaluating thoughts as "good" or "bad" or otherwise. You simply notice them and return to the breath.

Questions to explore:

- What is one way you have tried to integrate Love into your daily actions and interactions so you can "work gently and lovingly" (page 142) to be compassion in the world?
- What is a practice you've found helps you "act deliberately and mindfully, not impulsively or rushed" (page 142)?
- Where do you feel the wonder of the sacred most often? We remember that the friar says, "To be with God we don't always have to be in church" (page 144).
- If you want the joy of encountering The Heart of Brother Lawrence as first published in 1694, copy and paste into an online search engine (with no quotation marks):
  "les moeurs et entretiens laurent google books." Then go to page 79 (it's section 11). Or use this link, which Carmen customized for you: https://bit.ly/heartofbrotherlawrence. Then reflect on what it means that this page is adorned by a hand-crafted bird and angels, and on how intimate these and Carmen's hand-sized editions feel.

Practice:

Throughout *Practice of the Presence* we read that Brother Lawrence practiced gratitude in micro-moments throughout the day. It's not surprising that in this 1,200-word summary of the friar's teaching—"The Heart of Brother Lawrence"—Joseph includes this reminder: "We must stop as often as we can—for a brief moment—to love God deep in our heart, savoring grace even though briefly and secretly, praising them, asking for help, offering them our heart, and thanking them" (pages 142–143). Stop for a moment to meditate on a small blessing that happened to you recently. It can be a kindness done for you by another person. Or it can be a hot cup of coffee. Just be grateful for a moment.

To-Go reflection:

"Don't get tired of doing little things for the love of God.
They consider not the importance of the work but the love."

—TERESA OF ÁVILA, TRANSLATED BY CARMEN ACEVEDO BUTCHER

6. Profile: Be gentle and show great kindness

Practice:

We know that when Brother Lawrence was ill at the end of his life, Archbishop Fénelon visited him and found that the friar was "very sick yet very cheerful," as he wrote in a letter. One reason is that the friar had developed the habit of gratitude. Sing together this song and read about it on Carmen's YouTube channel: "I am gratitude, I am gratitude, the present moment is my true self, and I am whole right now. I am here. I am here. I am gratitude." Her video "Gratitude in Singing in the Morning" can be found here: https://bit.ly/gratitudecab.

Questions to explore:

- Brother Lawrence says, "I flip my little omelette in the frying pan for the love of God" (page 156). We also read that, to the friar, "the smallness of the thing in no way diminished the worth of his offering, because God, needing nothing, considers only the love accompanying our works" (page 159). What is a simple, everyday task you do that you could turn into a loving act of prayer, and how? After you have tried this, what does that task look like now?
- We read here about the friar: "His goodness made him gentle" and "a warm, welcoming person" who "showed great kindness" (page 153). In him, "you knew you'd found a friend" (page 153). Think of a person in your life, a figure from history or a contemporary, who is "an excellent model of genuine compassion" (page 152), as Joseph says of Brother Lawrence. Who comes to mind, and why?
- What do you think is the difference between "knowing of God" (page 154) and actually knowing God in the sense the friar names here?
- The passages on the "wise philosopher" are often omitted from translations, yet are some of the most beautiful and helpful. Read aloud these passages on pages 163–165, then reflect on how your life has grown over the years in the ways of the wise philosopher. As you reflect, speak of your gratitude for that, and consider how you might want to grow more, so that "in all your actions you are thanking God" (164).
- Do you have a "high opinion" of God, as Brother Lawrence did—"as unlimited justice and infinite kindness" (page 159)?

Practice:

Sit a moment. Imagine what your life might be like if you considered each person you meet as someone divine. In scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" means you and your neighbor are deeply interconnected—as Rami Shapiro says, "a single self." What if your "neighbor" included all people and all creatures? Rami Shapiro teaches a simple wise practice called "the philosophy of the face," where we look for the divinity in each person, creature, and creation we meet. It echoes South African theologian Desmond Tutu, who taught the Ubuntu concept rooted in African philosophy, that "I am because you are." Breathe deeply for a few moments, and consider: How can you practice seeing the divine face in every person and every creature you meet today?

To-Go reflection:

"My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together."

—DESMOND TUTU

7. Last Words: Cultivate hope

Practice:

This practice can be done indoors or outdoors, in a group or at any time during your day. Take in a deep breath through your nose, and release it slowly through your mouth. Let your mind relax, and turn your mind-heart-self to the open sky. Breathe in again. Then send a second breath out into that open sky. Breathe out slowly. Let go into the vast openness above you. Breathe in deeply as if you're breathing in the sky. If you do this brief practice outdoors, breathe in the sky's spaciousness and breathe out slowly, letting go into that generous openness above you. Look up. As Anne Lamott says, "You can trap bees on the bottom of mason jars without lids because they don't look up, so they just walk around bitterly bumping into the glass walls. Go outside. Look up. We're free. Secret of life." As you breathe out slowly, "let the sky meditate you," as Willa Blythe Baker says. Try this several times.

Questions to explore:

- Carmen's translation concludes with Last Words, the eulogy—literally "good words"—written after the friar's death in 1691 by his dear friend Joseph. We're reminded that Brother Lawrence developed his practice of the presence from his own experience with trauma, physical pain, disability, and severe anxiety—a practice he needed for his own healing and calmness. Here we discover that when young Nicolas Herman, not yet Brother Lawrence, entered the Paris monastery, he was experiencing severe anxiety: "Everything scared him" (page 176). At that painful point, he began practicing the presence earnestly, instinctively, and he continued returning to it, even when he did not see immediate positive results. Return to Last Words in *Practice of the Presence*. What are the ways Nicolas Herman, Brother Lawrence, handled the distressing experiences that marked his first decade in the monastery?
- We also read in Last Words that Brother Lawrence's dark night of the soul lasted ten years, from age 26 to 36. It "stretched him to his limits" because feelings of being "unworthy" of love and fluctuating emotions "dominate[d] his own soul," and he "was plunged . . . [into] thick darkness" (pages 177, 176, 174, 176). What is your understanding of the dark night of the soul?
- Have you experienced a dark night of the soul?
- We read about the friar that in "each of the earth's marvels he noticed the different traits of the Creator's power, wisdom, and kindness," that "these delighted his spirit, often filling him with wonder," and that he wrote "many lyrical and tender things about the grandeur of God and the ineffable ways they communicate their love to our souls" (page 183). When was the last time you felt this delight of being out in nature, and where were you at the time?
- Because the friar's death was remarkably calm, consistent with how he'd lived calmly every day, Joseph relates it twice, here and in the Profile. Thinking on Brother Lawrence's calmness, what is

one thing you might do—that you can control—to make your experience of life and your present path a calmer one?

- We also read that Brother Lawrence "helped the poor in their need, doing everything in his power that he could" (page 188). In what ways might you take steps to make the world a more just place for all?
- Why do you think Joseph writes of his friend Brother Lawrence: "The more hopeless things seemed to him, the more he hoped" (page 186)? How was Brother Lawrence able to cultivate such hope?

Practice:

Take a moment to tell the fuller story of the last time you felt "the grandeur of God" (page 184). When was it, where was it, what season of the year, and what did it smell, feel, sound, look, and (possibly) taste like? Who were you with? If you can, write a brief paragraph on how this "grandeur" and this experience made you feel. Did it change your life or your perspective? In what way? Did it grow your intimacy with Mystery?

To-Go reflection:

"[The dark night of the soul] means that we have said yes
to annihilation, without any expectation that we will be resurrected. . . .
[It's] a spiritual crisis that actually turns out to be a great blessing."

—MIRABAI STARR

8. Joyful Lagniappe: Don't rush

Practice:

Brother Lawrence saw the divine, the sacred in everything. Stirring soup, peeling potatoes, hoeing in the garden, mending a smelly sandal, seeing nature's beauty, talking with all people, seeing all creatures—all became holy to him. As he practiced the presence over decades, his life became filled with ineffable, unshakable—or as he put it, "unspeakable"—joy (page 132, Third Conversation).

Because singing engages us in diverse ways—our body, our breath, our mind, our joy, our soul, and often in community—singing helps us remember the truth that all creation is sacred. Singing also stills our true self and is a beautiful form of calming breathwork. So we end with singing. Because when we sing, whether with others or on our own, that's always a new beginning. The "Stillness" chant is from Paulette Meier's *Wellsprings of Life: Quaker Wisdom in Chant*. I'm singing it with permission from Paulette Meier for the music and from Gerard Guiton for the lyrics. I appreciate them for allowing me to share it with you. Lyrics: "Stillness, deep, deep within us, from small beginnings it flows, into the living water, the ocean of God, through our stillness God moves." Hear Carmen sing it on her YouTube channel, and learn to sing it yourself. Let its beauty fill your soul and go with you through the day, as you sing it often. Listen to Carmen sing "Stillness," and you're invited to sing along: https://youtu.be/R7jkVNQuvzo

Questions to explore:

- Reflect on the simply powerful, embodied imagery Brother Lawrence uses to describe his practice of the presence prayer. What does each one mean to you?
  The friar says that the practice of the presence prayer is:
  - searching for and digging into our inner infinite divine treasures, echoing his spiritual ancestor John of the Cross;
  - discovering peace so that the world's disturbances become as a straw fire flaring up and going out immediately;
  - having ongoing mini-conversations with God that we grow "accustomed to" (page 44), echoing Teresa of Ávila;
  - giving a longing look at or gazing lovingly at God;
  - knowing light, fire, and warmth for the soul's journey;
  - becoming the rock in life's difficulties, when you are like a ship tossed by storms in a raging sea of emotion;
  - like drinking milk from the Divine Nurse's breasts;
  - helping us accept forgiveness from the all-powerful Ruler who then serves us at their table, as a mother might;
  - a hopeful walking, sometimes stumbling, atoning, and getting back up, prayerfully.
- Do you have a favorite metaphor from Brother Lawrence's wisdom? Why did you choose that one?
- Why does the friar say that his practice of the presence is "easy"? Do you find it easy?
- For self-healing, Brother Lawrence developed his easy presence practice. It helped him live in and *from* powerful Divine Feminine energy. His teachings and practice can help you enter into a deeper, gentler friendship with your sacred self, gradually build self-ease in daily circumstances, bring calmness, and help you feel connected with Love and more embodied. With this in mind, reflect on these two questions: What do you most appreciate about your sacred self? What would you most like the practice of the presence to transform in your sacred life?
- What other mystics have you discovered who come to mind when you read Brother Lawrence? Why?
- If your favorite mystic and Brother Lawrence could have tea together, what might they discuss?
- What do you find are the major themes of Brother Lawrence's teaching that have relevance for your life?

Practice:

This practice is a self-emptying or kenotic form of prayer based on the beatitudes of Jesus, and it shares much in common with Tibetan Buddhism's tonglen practice. It is simple to do. Being poor in spirit means giving up my certainties and making space for listening to my own pain and others' pain. Being someone who mourns means being one who feels grief, my own and others'. In any day, and especially in our time of collective trauma, it can help you to slow down and process. Feel.

Pause. Take a few slow, deep breaths. On the in-breath, bring in your pain, feel it, and think of others who share that same pain, and breathe in their pain also. On the out-breath, share out blessings and comfort to and for yourself and to and for others. Do this breathing in and breathing out with these intentions several times. Take your time.

To-Go reflection:

"By love, God can be embraced and held, but not by thinking. . . . That's why I'm willing to abandon everything I know, to love the one thing I cannot think. . . . So this is my advice to you. At some point, if you want your soul to grow, give up your painstaking intellectual meditations and open yourself up to finding out more about this contemplation we've discussed. Then you'll get a taste of the deep feelings of the soul that come from loving God. . . . Grace is rarely in a rush."

—ANONYMOUS, *CLOUD OF UNKNOWING: WITH THE BOOK OF PRIVY COUNSEL*, TR. CARMEN ACEVEDO BUTCHER (PAGES 21, 222-223)

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Teresa of Ávila. *Interior Castle.*

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