



IN THE BEGINNING  
THERE WAS  
LOVE



Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network



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# DEAR FRIENDS IN THE LORD

The Way of the Heart is the spiritual itinerary proposed by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. It is the compass for our mission, a mission of compassion for the world. The Way of the Heart is part of the process initiated by Pope Francis with *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel".

The Way of the Heart was the result of several years of international work led by Father Claudio Barriga, S.J. Like any international document, it is a group effort, which has taken into account diverse cultures, languages, ecclesial and spiritual experiences. It has its richness and its limits. We presented this itinerary to Pope Francis in a document entitled: "A pathway with Jesus, in apostolic readiness" (December 2014). It presented a new way of understanding the mission of the Apostleship of Prayer, in a dynamic of apostolic availability. The Holy Father approved it in August 2014.

The Way of the Heart is essential for the recreation of this ecclesial service as the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network. It is a deepening of the spiritual tradition of the Apostleship of Prayer for today, and articulates in an original way essential elements of this spiritual treasure with the dynamics of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the key to the interpretation of our mission, our compass. That is why in 2017 I proposed a commentary. The idea was to help the national teams of the Pope's Prayer Network to deepen each step and enter into its inner dynamics, so that they could propose, with their own creativity, materials that would help to enter into The Way of the Heart. We call this text the "Internal dynamics of the path".

However, few teams began to create new materials and proposals with The Way of the Heart, and we quickly realized that without them, progress in the recreation process of this pontifical work would be very slow. We started in 2018, with an international team, to write 11 books. This team was led by Bettina Raed, regional director of the Pope's Prayer Network in Argentina-Uruguay. It is from the land of Pope Francis, with the support of several Jesuit companions, that this work was coordinated. I am particularly grateful to Bettina for all her availability, her writing and coordination work.

I hope that these materials will help us to propose this mission of compassion to the world with creativity (spiritual retreats, formation sessions, meetings on the first Friday of the month, etc.). This is the basis of our mission. ***The Way of the Heart helps to enter into the spiritual dynamic of recreation, the dynamic of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.***

P. Frederic Fornos, S.J.  
International Director  
Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network Original Spanish  
December 3, 2019 - St. Francis Xavier

IN THE BEGINNING  
THERE WAS  
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**STEP 1**  
BOOK 3

## Outline to guide us through step one

*Key word: To Love.*

*Objective: Recognize how loved we are.*

*Attitudinal keys: Recognize what gives me life, recognize the gratuitousness of love.*

*What you want to receive - Fruit: The grace of being grateful.*

*Internal dynamics of the step: From "not realizing" to "recognizing and marveling at" the love in my life.*

## Referential Framework

The first and permanent Word in our life of faith is the Eternal Love of the Father. Love is what God is continually desiring to communicate to us and is reflected in all that He does for us every day: I love You. It is God's essence. **"God is love"** (1 John 4:8). God cannot not love us. LOVE is the unique lens through which God always sees and accompanies us, regardless of the course our lives have taken, even if we have turned away from Him due to sin. His love is unconditional and unchanging. It is the beginning and foundation of our spiritual journey, for our life begins thanks to his love, is sustained by Him, and will one day be received by His love. Recognizing that kind of love leads us to respond to it.

## Internal dynamics of Step One

In the beginning there was love. What does it mean to love and be loved? What meanings do I give to the word "love"? Let us pause for a moment of silence.

Have we had the experience of being loved by our parents, friends, any other persons? Love is at the beginning, Love precedes us, Love has given us life, Life, even when it has been wounded. I can always picture the faces of people who have loved me, have held me dear to their hearts, and who still love me today.

St. Paul said: **"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing"**. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Even if I cannot recognize this love in my life, there is a certainty, though not immediately perceived: He who is the source of life, of the visible and invisible universe, has loved me forever. He says, "I love you," *"Behold, in the palms of my hands, I have engraved you."* (Isaiah 49:16) God loves me not in a general way, but in a concrete and personal way, to the point of having given his life for me, for all humanity, even to the point of shedding His blood, so that we may recognize all the height, width, and depth of his love for each one of us. His Love is so great, that the oceans could not even contain him, or the rivers could not shut him off! This kind of Love is impossible to translate, transmit, even with the most beautiful writing, because it requires a personal encounter. It is like falling in love. We have all read books and novels on the subject, and movies have thrilled us, but when you fall in love, everything changes, it is as if you live in a new world.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new world has emerged. "The Resurrection tells us that the path of love, followed by Jesus unconditionally until the surrender of His own life, is not a path that leads to nothingness, it is not a dead end. The path of love is also the path that opens us to life" (Fr. Louis Evely). In Jesus Christ we have the assurance that love exists and that we are loved. St. John in his first letter tells us: *"The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers"* (1 John 3:16). Love is the way, the truth, and the life.

For this reason, it is essential to recognize this love in our lives and to thank the Lord, the source of all good. To recognize this aspect of our relationship with God calls us to be grateful.

**To dig deeper, see Resources and Appendix One: "Love. What is Love?"**



A VIEW FROM  
**THE BIBLICAL**  
PERSPECTIVE





## A view from the Biblical perspective

What could we say that does not sound like a repetition about the presence in the Bible of God's love for His people? Let us open the Bible and no matter where we open it, we will find multiple manifestations of God's Love for his creation, especially for people created in His image and likeness.

The Bible in all its books is the account of the experience of God's love retold by communities, of people who recognize in their lives the infinite presence of God's love that precedes them, that encompasses them, that fills them. It is the history of the Creator's love for His creatures and of His work of saving them, a story inspired by God and told by those who have lived this experience in their lives. It is a word of life for everyone, which does not go out of style, which is addressed to each person in a particular way. A living and effective word, always renewed for each person, a word of life that invites us to feel and recreate our own experience of love and salvation, discovering it and weaving it with the Lord as we read His Scriptures. What do these words of Love addressed by God to people from another time have to say to us today? The experience of God's Love narrated in the Bible is made alive today in each one of us.

We find numerous images of God as an eternal lover always attentive to His creatures **"with eternal love I loved you,"** (Jeremiah 31:3); as a Father who lovingly cares for and protects His children, **"See, the nations count as a drop in the bucket, as a wisp of cloud on the scales; the coastlands weigh no more than a speck. Does a mother forget or stop loving her own child? For even if she forgets, I will not forget you, said the Lord. I carry you engraved in the palms of my hands"** (Isaiah 49:15), "You are my son, I have begotten you today" (Psalm 2:7). The Lord is the shepherd who tirelessly cares for his sheep, especially those most fragile and most in need of his love and tenderness: **"Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, leading the ewes with care"** (Isaiah 40:11).



The Bible is the story of God's love for his people, and how they have responded, not always lovingly, to their Creator and Lord. The Bible tells us about a Love that believes in us, that cares for us, that saves us, that desires us to be with Him: ***"The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul.***

***He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name..."*** (Psalm 23:1-3). The Love of the Lord is a love that strengthens, rebuilds, lifts the fallen and is faithful forever: ***"You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and summoned from its far-off places, to whom I have said, you are my servant; I chose you, I have not rejected you..."*** (Isaiah 41:9).

God takes the initiative. He is the One who loves us so much and so strongly that his love itself is creative; He cannot love without empowering those whom He loves to enter into and become part of His life. God in his infinite love communicates His life to us and invites us to participate in it. Thus, the Apostle John tells us that, ***"Love consists of this: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us first and sent us His Son"*** (1 John 4:10).

Jesus himself speaks to us of his love for us and of the love of his Father, ***"As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Remain in my love."*** (John 15:9).

God can only love, and His love can neither diminish or abate no matter what happens or whatever we do. Paul in his letter to the Romans makes an extensive reference to the depth and magnitude of God's love, as an unimaginable reality, impossible to grasp fully. It is so strong that nothing and no one could separate us from it. For St. Paul, God's love is expressed in the gift of Christ Jesus who gave his life for us and nothing and no one can separate us from that love or take that love away from us. Nothing and no one will make the Lord love us less.

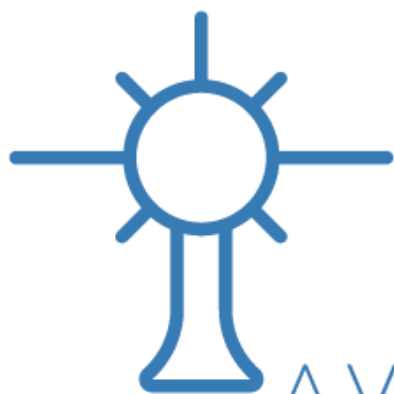
*"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Cf. Romans 8:35-39)*



- *With eternal love I loved you...* (Jeremiah 31:3)
- *Does a mother forget or stop loving her own child? Well, even if she forgets, I won't forget you, says the Lord. I have you engraved on the palms of my hands.* (Isaiah 49:15)
- *Love consists of this: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us first and sent us His Son.* (1 John 4:10)
- *God chose us in Christ since before the creation of the world.* (Ephesians 1:4)
- *Nothing can separate us from the love that God has shown us in Christ Jesus, our Lord!* (Romans 8:39).

**Contemplative Exercise:** Read Psalm 135 (136), slowly taking in each word, tasting, and feeling the words that the Psalmist places in the mouth of the people of Israel. Stop at those phrases that resonate most with you inwardly and repeat them inside you as a type of music or mantra that accompanies the rhythm of your breathing.

At the end, take your journal notebook and write your own prayer of thanksgiving, in which you bring to your memory the action of God's love in your personal history.



A VIEW FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE  
**OF FAITH.**



## A view from the perspective of Faith

### Love

*"For God's Word, through Whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh and dwelt [in] the world of [people]. Thus He entered the world's history as a perfect [human being], taking that history up into Himself and summarizing it. He Himself revealed to us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the worlds transformation... " (Gaudium et Spes No. 38)*

In Christ Jesus, Christians recognize *"the visible image of the invisible God"* (Colossians 1:15). Through him we glimpse both what God is and what we human beings are called to be: fullness of receptivity and self-giving. The complete self-giving of God in Jesus and Jesus in God manifests the mystery *"from which we all receive grace upon grace"* (John 1:16).

In the beginning, there was only God, and God is Love. Divine Love that is a communication, a giving, and in that giving, giving rise to Creation, to the universe and everything in it. Our existence can only be understood as creatures of God. Creatures who are the fruit of God's love.

The one and unique Being reveals Himself to us and communicates from the depths of Himself as the original Source (the Father!), and as a Vessel, a Receptacle with a constitutive capacity to be welcoming (the Son!), and as a constant Flow of becoming to let others come into being, be born themselves (Spirit!). We are invited to participate in this relationship without ever having ceased to be in it, nor feeling that we have not been part of it at any time. In God, the whole reality of existence is contained. There is no reality outside of God.

In his Love for us, the God of Jesus Christ chose to reveal himself to the human being, and He did it in that "before and after" where affections and actions become anecdotes, in history. The eternal and omnipotent God decides to bring history into being so He can invite us to have a personal dialogue with Him. The whole universe has been created so that this dialogue can exist, that is, so that every response of ours to God may be passionately awaited, and then respected, by Him.

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). "Being at the door..." means waiting, and there is no waiting without time. But what does God expect? No more or less than the welcome of his dialogue partner, the*



human person who will let Him enter, sit at the table, and dine with Him. And a human, with his positive response, will "have dinner with God." The common dinner equals the importance of the diners, and in that equality, God expects us to change our attitudes towards Him, towards the world and towards all persons, especially the most unprotected.

Jesus is the conjunction of God who is the Divine Son in eternity and the one who has become a human son in history, in order to awaken in us the ability to recognize ourselves as "capax Dei", capable of Love, created to receive the outpouring of God, destined to become the content for which we have been made containers, as it were.

The interiorization of Christ Jesus in each of us becomes his continuous Incarnation, as he continues to be also God's creative act.

The experience of being loved opens us to the possibility of loving. **"Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love"** (1 John 4:8). St. Augustine in his work "De Trinitate" (PL. 42, 957-958) writes: "Are you thinking about what God is or what God would be like? So that you may enjoy something else, know that God is love, that same love with which we love... Let no one say: I do not know what I am loving. Just love your neighbor with the same love, and they will love with the same love. Because, in reality, you know better the love with which you love the brother or sister than the brother you love. Well, there you have a God that known better than the brother or sister themselves. Much better because it is more present, closer, and surer."

In us, limited human beings, when we love, God "abides" in us, or, if you prefer, he or she that loves "is born of" God, belongs to God, but in the manner of a child. This gift of God's love for us, who inhabits us, who makes us like Him, is His gift, to be his dialogue partners and co-creators in his plan to humanize creation.

We will act like God if he moves us to act with the same attitude that put forward divine love in action: *Giving himself freely and fully.*

We are immersed in the Being, Existence of God. There he created us out of love, so that by being in Him and having the experience of True Love, we may love. With real love, the loving we know, to love given our own limitations.

God remains in us. We possess the uncreated, the almighty, the absolute..., within us. We do not possess a grace, a gifted something, a divine gift that God gave us. He himself is immersed in our existence. He is His own gift to us.

In the face of such a gift, will I not be grateful?

**To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix Two. "In the midst of storms... Just Love."**



A VIEW FROM  
**THE SPIRITUAL**  
PERSPECTIVE.



## A view from the Spiritual perspective

To examine our life is to learn to seek God's presence in all our experiences every day and discover the ways in which the Good Shepherd becomes present. To examine is to search inside our hearts, to observe, to allow what has already happened in time to become present repeatedly.

When you examine yourself, you take, so to speak, a spectator's stance of yourself. It is like you are viewing a movie of what you are examining. In that "inner viewing", you bring to the present what has been lived. However, as an observer, a spectator, often you will not be totally neutral, you will form a perspective, an opinion as you look at what most likely will be tinged by the feelings that inhabit you at the time of the spiritual review.

The personal spiritual review is essentially a way of praying. It is not just an intellectual assessment or a purely rational exercise. Nor is it merely a sentimental revisiting of past events. To examine yourself is to pray, to open a space of inner silence deep in your soul, and to prepare yourself for an encounter with God. Therefore, when we examine ourselves, we become receptive to encounter the Lord in what we are examining. That is why we talk about "seeking the presence of God" when we examine ourselves.

As the time for a personal spiritual review is a time of prayer, a special way of praying, it is especially important to start that moment of personal examination by becoming aware, very conscious of, and present to yourself, becoming aware of how you are and what feelings inhabit you at that moment. Why is this consciousness important? Because those current feelings have the potential to transform the feelings you experienced in the events you are looking at in a particular personal spiritual review. In other words, if at the time of examining your day, there is joy and enthusiasm in your heart, the sad moments you have experienced may at that moment be colored with that same joy. Therefore, spiritually speaking some spiritual writers refer to this personal prayer action as "an examination of consciousness".

The personal spiritual review or review of your heart has a purpose: to discover how the Creator works in your life, how He becomes present to you, inhabits you, accompanies you, helps you, gives you comfort. The spiritual review also corrects your habitual course of acting while warning you of your deviation from doing God's will. The personal spiritual review also has a framework, or a tendency, a framework from which we tend to act, which also can be call a "password", a "key", and that gives us a perspective, deeper view, a way of looking at what we see, and invites us to take





a different approach or orientation in our general outlook.

The experience of God's love, the discovery that He, in his infinite mercy, loves us to the point of madness is the initial kickoff, the push and the perspective to listen for in every personal examination. A love that is given to us first, who takes the initiative and does not expect us to do anything to manifest Himself. It is manifested in our lives as concrete love. It is a love that is embodied in the events we live. It reaches out to us and discovers us.

If we look at our day, "through the code" of that Love, we discover that the Life given to us is pure gift, manifested in numerous small spiritual gifts that throughout the day are recognized as true free gifts. We become conscious of being alive, able to breathe, with health little or too much, and the persons who accompany us along the way, in our workplace, in nature, in our unique talents, our abilities. We could continue to name so much good that we receive and that we have not given to ourselves, but that it is freely given to us.

When we are able to experience in our heart this experience of having received so much good, gratitude arises as an almost spontaneous impulse of the soul who knows that its life is sustained by the gift-giver. Recognizing and being grateful for all the good in our lives as a concrete sign of love given to us is the initial consciousness or perspective of the spiritual review, that orientation or key that we talked about above.

The personal spiritual review you are invited to practice daily must begin with this perspective of gratitude in your heart. Recognizing all that is beautiful and good in our lives drives us to thank God for God's free love. That is why when you start your time of spiritual review time, we invite you to ask yourself:

What am I thankful for? What special grace have I received today? For what do I want to thank the Father? For whom in your life do you desire to be thankful today?

Now start going through your day and recognize God's presence and action in your day by looking at and recognizing all that is a gift and for which you want to give thanks for.

End your personal exam session, as Saint Ignatius invites us by thanking God, for so much good received!



A VIEW FROM  
**THE POPE'S**  
PERSPECTIVE.



## A view from the Pope's writings

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.

In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: ***“The love of Christ urges us on”*** (2 Cor 5:14); ***“Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel”*** (1 Cor 9:16).

The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others”. When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For “here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means”. Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ”.

### *Eternal newness*

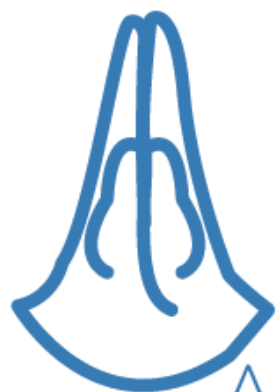
A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization. The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ. God constantly renews his faithful ones, whatever their age: ***“They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint”*** (Is 40:31). Christ is the ***“eternal Gospel”*** (Rev 14:6); he ***“is the same yesterday and today and forever”*** (Heb 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is forever young and a constant source of newness. The Church never fails to be amazed at ***“the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God”*** (Rom 11:33). Saint John of the Cross says that “the thicket of God's wisdom and knowledge is so deep and so broad that the soul, however much it has



come to know of it, can always penetrate deeper within it". Or as Saint Irenaeus writes: "By his coming, Christ brought with him all newness". With this newness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him, and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always "new".

Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord's work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer". In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides, and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that **"he has loved us first"** (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone **"gives the growth"** (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy amid a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.

Nor should we see the newness of this mission as involving a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward. Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call "Deuteronomic", not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church's daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace for which we constantly need to beg. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: **"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon"** (Jn 1:39). Together with Jesus, this remembrance makes present to us "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: **"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God"** (Heb 13:7). Some of them were ordinary people who were close to us and introduced us to the life of faith: **"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice"** (2 Tim 1:5). The believer is essentially "one who remembers." (Evangeli Gaudium, 9-13).



A VIEW FROM  
THE PERSPECTIVE.  
**OF PRAYER**



## A View from the Perspective of Prayer

### Being Grateful Humanizes Us

We have become accustomed to asking, claiming, or demanding things from others. Why? Perhaps because we are aware that without others, we lack something, that we are a "product" that is not finished, and we need them to "complete" us. But complete what? The intensity with which we demand "things" from others such as affection, attention, time, for example, is proportional to the awareness of feeling incomplete. We can learn more or less quickly that we need things from others, but it is most important to understand that no one owes us anything! We did not come into the world to claim what someone owes us. Others are not in the world to meet our expectations. We are here to learn what it means to love and be loved, to be grateful. What we lack is to be grateful for the love we receive from others. We also need to learn to be thankful for the love, the affection, the time that others give us for free. The best way to complete what we lack is to learn to be grateful to others. If we do not set aside the idea that "someone" owes us something, whatever it is, we will never come to build in us the attitude of gratitude that is vital to our personal development and growth. Other persons help us complete what is missing in us, when we receive their love, and that is to thank them.

Gratitude is a key ingredient in the experience of being loved and loving. The person with a grateful heart knows how to recognize God's love operating and giving itself to us through others. To be grateful is to make room for the dynamics of the Spirit of God motivating us and that renews our lives in love. To understand the logic of God's love, we must move from the realm of duty to the realm of gift. Without this essential step, it is difficult to arrive at being grateful. A legalistic sense of duty sometimes makes us lose sight of everything we should be grateful for. Our life is usually full of projects, dreams and goals, places to get to, spaces to conquer, peaks to climb, and we run the risk of turning our souls into a wall on which to hang medals, or a shelf of trophies or a repository of diplomas. In our lives there is much more than simply fulfilling our duties, we need to learn to recognize that we are loved beyond our accomplishments. Without this learning, we will never know what it means to give thanks. It is "almost" impossible to feel loved and forgiven if we do not deepen our understanding of the mystery of God's gratuitous love.

How do we learn to be grateful? To do this we need to be conscious of the Spirit of God Who operates in human love. There is more love of God operating in the given human love than we will ever realize. Grateful people are persons, above all, with "eyes wide open", fully awake. That is, persons that choose to be conscious, attentive, in a nutshell, full of mystical feelings expressed in their own words. To develop an



attitude of gratitude requires, on our part, an inner willingness to recognize the good that happens around us without us having done anything to make it happen. Without this attitude of gratitude, we will find it difficult to get out of our rigid sense duty to enter the realm of gratitude from the heart. We need to consciously decide, every day, to live that day with an attitude of gratefulness. This does not mean painting our present reality covered as a pink rose or denying problems or conflicts. It is about searching and striving to find the gift that is hidden when only seen through pragmatic and utilitarian eyes. When we make the decision to be grateful, in every situation in life, even if it seems tragic to us now, we also need to see that it has a "positive side to it." "Giving" and "saying" thanks helps to create a complete attitude in us to be more "fully human beings" as created by God.

**To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix Three. "Life... from gratitude."**

## **Exercise – The Practice of Spiritual Review**

### **Deepening the first time of re-reading (reviewing).**

#### **Thank you!**

First, I look at where light is present in my life, that is, everything that produces openness in me and makes me live more in depth my present moment, such as a gesture, a word or a smile, a personal encounter, or events, etc. It is important to practice how to recognize life in the smallest daily things, in order to recognize more and more Who is the source of my life. We know this much: the gift of life, the gift of love, make no noise. That is why we have so much difficulty in discerning the presence of the Lord. Only the person who loves recognizes the beloved. The more I give thanks, the more reasons I find to give thanks constantly.

#### **Practice Thematic Spiritual Review**

*What do you feel you have to be thankful for today?*

Take some distance from the events of the day. Stop the incessant need to be on the go and find a quiet place to make your personal spiritual reviews today. The Lord awaits this encounter with you. Take a deep breath and become aware of your body, your posture, your breathing and how you feel right now.

Rummage over your day from dawn to the present moment. Look inside yourself without judgment, stop at the places you visited, the people you have met, nature that surrounds you; smell the air, feel the sun rays warming you, listen to the birds chirping, admire their different and multiple colors, etc. Take some minutes and delight in today's flavors and smells again.

Recognize the work you were able to do, the help given and received, your physical stamina, your mental abilities, and your more outstanding feelings now.

Review the conversations, listen again to the words you heard and those expressed by you again, stop to observe in your imagination people's gestures. What have you learned, or chosen not to listen to?

Go back to your heart and allow yourself to re-experience what you felt during the day. Give yourself permission to recreate what has been lived just for today. What do you have to be thankful for? What special grace did you receive today? What was a surprise that made your day? Was there any moment in which you felt pleasantly



fulfilled or mostly satisfied?

Now, pause some minutes to say to the Father, "Thank you for this day," for this or for that other experience due to your present life situation. Take note of what is significant and what you have gained from the practice of this personal spiritual review, and bring your prayer period to a close.



IN THE BEGINNING  
THERE WAS  
LOVE

**RESOURCES**

## Resources

### Appendix One

#### Love, what is love?

*“This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”* (Matthew 22:39).

It can be said that, deep down, sin only damaged one thing: love. And it can also be said that the grace of God, which Christ gained for us on the Cross, restored only one thing: Love, and through love, restored everything.

Lack of love: this is the name of death; fullness of love: this is the name of Life. Because God is Love.

Truly, created by love and redeemed by love, we human beings have love as our starting point, love as our first language, as our only happiness, and as our fundamental hope. Never, then, can its importance in our lives be overestimated. To be wrong about this is to be wrong about everything.

**Love is our starting point** because very being, our selfhood, our existence was not something we had to bargain for. It was simply bestowed, and given to us as a gift. And to give, to give oneself is almost the very nature of love. The very first thing, then, that ever happened to us is called love! And from that first and fundamental fact of our being created by love, we look at and value all other facts that affect our lives.

**Love is our first language.** From the moment love has made life possible--"my life and your life"--from that very moment, it has opened us up to others, to basic relationships and to all other created beings. Therefore, since we have been created as human beings, the only key that opens us to relate to all created beings is called love. Furthermore, the languages we learn later, like gestures, caresses, crying, words to express our feelings, can always be considered as second languages whose expressive strength depends on the first language of love. When it is missing or has serious deficiencies, no gesture, no caress, no crying, no word can replace it.

**Love is a unique joy.** Even our natural longing for happiness is fulfilled only by love. It is wrong to call happiness that which has an end, that which disappoints, that which can be bought, or that which does not satisfy. Even life passes, life is exhausted, life collapses. Only that which has been created by love continues to be called life, or as the Gospels tell us, Life Everlasting.

**Love is our deepest hope.** Because our yearning to love and to be loved is that for which we hope and in which we hope. Will love be here? Will it be him? Will it be her? It all depends on how this question is answered: "Will you love Me?" Happy are those who can answer, "Yes", because His Name is Love.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Amid Storms...Just Love.**

We all go through times in life when our assurances and certainties are shaken. Stormy times come when our boat will be rocked by strong waves and those certainties we had relied on for our securities, even unconsciously, fail. An unexpected event can suddenly change our outlook in life. In those moments, we are assailed by feelings of uncertainty and vertigo. We lose our ability to think clearly and our feelings get all confused. We experience these as times of totalrupture, of too much change, of crisis. It seems that the waves of the sea of our lives have become so overwhelming and rise well beyond our natural strengths to overcome.

A first temptation at these times is to concentrate our gaze too much on the immensity of the waves around us. Or we let our thoughts become entangled in the magnitude of the difficulty, the size of the immediate losses, or let other problems that haunt us get into the mix of our confusion. If we choose to stay fixed on these sudden events, our hearts will be imprisoned with despair and we will not succeed in taking the necessary steps to navigate through the storm.

We are not talking here about thinking about bad or harmful things. Many good things in our perceptions can also tie and enslave our hearts, such as, our work, some friends, our fruitless personal efforts, even the well acquired belongings, or our present life situation, when we allow them to become the sole center and the meaning of our existence. And yet, many times the storms that threaten to sink our present realities are often opportunities to "recalculate" the route and refocus our heart intentions.

A safe way out in these difficult times is to firmly direct our eyes and hands on the steering wheel and helm of our boat. This step that will allow us to maneuver our boat to get through the waves and get out of the present trouble. Who is at the steering wheel and helm of our lives?

When we find ourselves amid storms, some good things will inevitably sink, and so it is healthy to stop looking at the magnitude of the losses and ask ourselves about the true center our life, that is, center on the one Who steers the boat.

Ultimately only the experience of God's Love, the inner feeling of being creatures loved to eternity, brought into this world to be loved by God and to live in a fraternity of Love by helping those who need us, will be able to fill our lives and help us "recalculate our course" amid our storms. A wise adage says that many "finite creatures" will never be able to fill our thirst for infinity, eternity. Only God fills our empty spaces. "Only God suffices," as Saint Theresa of Avila was inspired to feel God's Love.

## **Appendix Three**

### **Life... from the perspective of gratitude.**

"Thankyou!" is one of those expressions loaded with positive meaning. So much so that when you pronounce it and receive it back, a "golden aura" surrounds what is appreciated and our hearts become more often, our inner feelings soften, and our hearts begin to beat more in rhythm with the heart of the giver.

To start looking at situations, people, details, experiences with a sense of gratitude is to moderate the voice of our inner judge, it prepares us to pay more attention to what abounds, what is a gift to us, and to look at reality from the perspective of the quality, and the opportunity present in the gift itself.

Furthermore, looking at expectations and desires from the point of view of gratitude is to experience what I long for as if I already had it, as if it had already been granted to me. It is like starting to enjoy that which we desire in an anticipated way. It is as if we invite our desire to create reality by its strength, by being grateful for what I desire as if it were already concretely and palpably present.

To look gratefully at reality, no matter what color it has, reduces my tendency to act from my critical judgment, to ponder how valuable each circumstance is, to grasp the exception when it seems that everything goes wrong. To be thankful is to recover, even in calamities, the presence of the gift, of life, of charm that a particular reality has, because there are exceptions for which to be grateful, even amid calamity.

A perspective of grateful appreciation is a habit of the heart, a habit that is forged, trained, desired, and lived out. It is a way of seeing that accepts reality for what it is, of course – be it bright or dark, and decides to choose to live from the light it finds. As we draw more and more from the depths of our hearts, in the end, we will desire unceasing gratitude, as the impetus and flow of life as received in the initial vision of reality.

The grateful gaze broadens the soul, brightens the heart, allows us to recognize the value of everything, the wellspring and the waterfall of Love that surrounds us, Love that is visible in the faces, in the gestures, in the colors, in my own life, in that of my brother and sister, in our laughter, in our tears... and in every opportunity that daily life lets us know that there is Life and that we are part of it.

To look with gratitude, to say thanks, to recognize what is given to us, to continue to unceasingly give thanks, is to dare to live from a spring that does not run dry, to challenge the darkness and pains, because Love has won the game and therefore always, (yes, always!) there will be a gift for which to be thankful.

To have a grateful view of reality and to nourish the attitude of gratitude, is to discover the God of the details, the God of the small, the always-present God, Who, as it were, hides in plain sight, in the apparently insignificant things, but always wanting to be found by us.

To cultivate the innate attitude of gratitude, is to nurture the capacity to refrain from being overly judgmental and critical of ourselves and of others, and so, be able to tell God all that we enjoy and want to continue receiving from Him, so that He will never stop giving them to us, and as if we dare to remind this loving God that we depend on his gifts and that we want to continue to receive them. It is to give thanks in advance, as if we were forcing the Father's generosity (if we could) as He is moved by the request of his beloved children.

To see with gratitude, to live from and by gratitude, is simply to live fully aware of God's gracious and limitless Love, God Who is present in all, yes, all! aspects of our precious and abundant Life.

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**STEP 1**  
BOOK 3