

THE HUMAN HEART  
IS RESTLESS  
AND NEEDY



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

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**STEP 2**  
BOOK 4



## Outline to guide the step

*Keyword: Self AWAKENING*

*Objective: To look at what moves my heart, where am I?*

*Attitudinal keys: Inner knowledge. Inner awareness and learning. Ask for inner light.*

*What you want to obtain – Fruit: A way of redirecting the choices in my life.*

*Inner dynamics for the step: From "feeling disoriented" to "inner reorientation." Looking into the basic coordinates of my existence.*

## Referential Framework

Human beings yearn for happiness and seek it in a multitude of ways. God gave us the capacity to love and to live generously. However, we often find ourselves disoriented and in a poor state, lost among our frustrations and profound desires, unable to resolve our present personal state of crisis and to find inner peace. Here we propose a personal pathway of faith, prayer and life for seekers, for those in spiritual need and for all who desire to receive Jesus Christ in their hearts. It is a path chosen by the humble of heart, where one's weakness and vulnerability are not a constant impediment to act as we seek God's Will, but rather, the best reservoir for encountering a God who always is choosing to care for the poor.

## Internal dynamics of the Step

All humans desire to love and be loved, however, we experience that it is often exceedingly difficult, and at times full of misunderstandings. ***"For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want"*** (Romans 7:18-19); says St. Paul in his letter to Christians in Rome. We have all experienced these feelings. Despite our innate desire to love, to be in harmony with others, desires for well-being and happiness, how many times do we choose mortal ways that harm others and destroy us at the same time? How many gestures, words, thoughts, do we harbor in ourselves that instead of opening ourselves to life giving choices, have led us instead down a path of death? Our choice to reject love and rather make choices based on the wrong feelings, can be so strong, simply because they are based on our selfishness, pride, hatred, and contempt, that subsequently tends to enclose us in ourselves, and separate us from others and from God. And this "self-enclosure, self-prison or inner hell" leads to death... As the book of Deuteronomy says: ***"I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore to***

*your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them*", (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). To choose Christ is to choose life.

God does not look at our sin, but He seeks our hearts. He is focused on our love, our desire to return to him, as Jesus tells us in the parable of the father of the prodigal son, (Cf. Luke 15). Or as Pope Francis tells us: "Jesus' gaze goes beyond sins and prejudices; and this is important and we must learn it, the gaze of Jesus goes beyond sins and prejudices, He sees the person with the eyes of God" (Angelus October 30, 2016). Jesus gives more importance to our faith, our love, than to the fulfillment of the law: *"Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners"* (Matthew 9:13).

It is also what Isaac the Syrian (seventh century) said, "Can God forgive me for these things that grief me and for which my memory haunts me? (...) Do not doubt your salvation... His mercy is much broader than what you can imagine, his grace, greater than you would dare to ask. He is always in search of the slightest repentance in him who allowed himself to have a part of his righteousness to be stolen, in his struggle with passions and sin" (Discourse 40).

"...God's forgiveness knows no bounds. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church. Thus, God is always ready to forgive, and he never tires of forgiving in ways that are continually new and surprising. Nevertheless, all of us know well the experience of sin. We know that we are called to perfection (cf. Mt 5:48), yet we feel the heavy burden of sin..." (Misericordiae Vultus, 22).



A VIEW FROM  
**THE BIBLICAL**  
PERSPECTIVE





## A view from the Biblical perspective

God is a Good Father, full of love and tenderness for his children. The experience of this love is expressed through the things and people that are usually part of our lives, such as: all of nature, the love we give and receive, the countless good things that happen to us, are gifts to awaken our gratitude and move us internally to respond with our lives to so much good that we have received. However, despite this undeniable experience of love that inhabits and surrounds us, we soon experience that our responses are not always faithful to the gifts received. We wish to do good, we would like to respond with love and tenderness to others, indeed, we desire to be just and supportive, and so many good desires that we attempt to put into action. But we do not always act as we would like, and so we experience contradictory, inconsistent feelings between what we desire and what we do. It is a fact that in the way we experience our fragility, our powerlessness, we also come to realize that we are capable of harm, of lies, of evil, in short of sin. It is also a fact that our attitudes cloud the good that inhabits us and with those attitudes we become complicit in the evil that also operates outside of us. We are not as good as we would like to be, and in the end we are not as good as we would like to be seen. We are inhabited by forces that take us away from the love received as a gift from God, and at the same time, take us away from the true way, make us act as lesser persons and transform us into collaborators of the dehumanization of our human relationships. Sin harms us and harms others.

What does the Bible have to tell us about this experience we live daily? How might the word of God be a companion for us in our existence? The Bible as a love story between God and humanity brings us the accounts of the infidelities, the derailments, and the dehumanization that men and women practiced in Jesus' time and throughout history. The protagonists in the Bible stories tell us how despite being aware and having experienced God's Promise come true, the creative and infinite love with which God loved them, their answers, and their behaviors did not always correspond to that free love gift. However, in that game of love and infidelities, God the Ever Faithful never abandoned them, never set aside, or left to their fate the children who in their fragility tried to continue to experience this love story with God. The Bible in its pages tells us how God, with love and tenderness, always brings us closer to the Other who opens us up and awakens us to the awareness of infidelity and the experience of the ever-present Promise of God who continues to seek and love to repair the lives of his children.



Samuel's second book tells us about the episode in which King David dazzled by the beauty of the wife of Uriah, sought to cover up his evil deeds, and his infidelity not only to God who had anointed him King of his people, but to his generals and their families who supported him in his struggle for the liberation of the people of Israel against his enemies. He comes to the extreme of having Uriah killed, in spite of Uriah being one of his best servants of the army, just to save his life and hide his sin. Nathan challenges King David for his conduct by bringing him to reflection with a fictional example and have King David in his wisdom rightly solve the injustice in the fictional example and condemn the one who had caused the injustice: ***"Now, a visitor came to the rich man, but he spared his own flocks and herds to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him: he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the one who had come to him. David grew terribly angry with that man and said to Nathan: "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves death! He shall make fourfold restitution for the lamb because he has done this and was unsparing." Then Nathan said to David: "You are the man! Nathan's indictment." Thus, says the LORD God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel. I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your Lord's house and your Lord's wives for your own. I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were not enough, I could count for you still more. Why have you despised the LORD and done what is evil in his sight? You have cut down Uriah the Hittite with the sword; his wife you took as your own, and him you killed with the sword of the Ammonites"*** (2 Samuel 12:4-9). **God rebukes us as Father and sends us aids along the way as He sent Nathan to King David to awaken the consciousness of his mistake and the harm he had caused.**

Sin and harm never have the last word, and the Bible tells us how God despite the men and women of His time insisting on their behaviors to turn away from the Father's Love, always maintained firm the desire to seek his children and kept his promise of eternal mercy, love, and salvation for all.

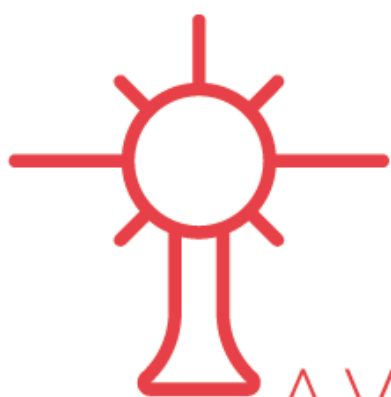
God promises his Eternal Love and we humans seek him with a fragile and needy heart, aware that our only refuge is the Love that sustains us, that He is always close to us and that He understands the damage and pain that men and women suffer and cause, ***"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord hear my voice!"*** (Psalm 130:1).

God's love heals harm, restores life, rebuilds bonds, and allows us to restore ourselves in our daily living and surroundings. Thus, the Evangelist Mark tells us the healing of Peter's mother-in-law: ***"Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her, and she waited on them"*** (Mark 1:31). Even when he heals a paralytic, Jesus' gaze is not placed on the impossibility or fragility but on the faith of those who



turn to him: ***"Seeing Jesus his faith said to the paralyzed, 'Son, your sins are forgiven, I command you to get up, take your stretcher, and go home.' He got up immediately, took his stretcher and went out in front of everyone"*** (Mark 3:1-5). "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored". (Mark 2: 5-11)

- ***"O God, you are my God—it is you I seek! For you, my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, in a land parched, lifeless, and without water"*** (Psalm 63:1)
- ***"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord hear my voice!"*** (Psalm 130:1).
- ***"Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God"*** (Matthew 5:3)
- "Where did you hide beloved, and leave me moaning?" (St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle)
- "You made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until it rests in you" (St. Augustine, Confessions).
- ***"That man is you"*** (2 Samuel 12:7). And Nathan said unto David, ***"You are that man."***
- (Cf. Romans 7:19-25) ***"Because I don't do the good, I want..."***



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



## A view from the perspective of Faith

The beautiful, colossal and at the same time subtle adventure of a God creating a limited human being before whose door He, the Almighty, must stop and call; and wait respectfully and eagerly to see whether or not your freedom invites him in and offers him or not your friendship. A God who has made an incomplete universe as well, to have a decisive human freedom before him cannot love a world of robots, a world-machine, devoid of personality and freedom, because love, personalizes, liberates, and holds us accountable.

In the Scripture passage that relates for us Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, the simple fact that temptation is possible even for God, means that God runs the same risks human beings to its fullness, and that we are not given to conceive of a saving intervention from God that eliminates the risk of human freedom and responsibility. God's triumph can only consist of the consecration of man's freedom, until humans respond freely. And this freedom, is a liberated freedom, that lies not so much in the possibility of human beings being able to say yes or no, but in the fact that our yes is not conditioned absolutely by anything other than love.

We are our freedom, or if you prefer, my being is the byproduct of what my freedom has decided, which is equivalent to saying that it is the history of my decisions that expresses the depths of my person, and that which allows others to know our inner fullness or spiritual depth.

However, *"What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I concur that the law is good..."* (Romans 7:15-16). *"So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if [I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me..."* (Romans 7:18-20). *"So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members..."* (Romans 7:21-23).

The consciousness of sin is healthy and necessary in so far as it must remind us and make us accustomed to the idea that our human creation is always a mixture of love with our selfishness and sin. Each one of our actions bears the two seeds: the weeds and the wheat. If guilt instills in us such a fear that makes us pretend, we can settle outside our history, in the neutrality and stillness of the timeless, sin is, as St Paul



refers in his letter to the Romans, the root of our slavery, of our rejection of the original status as co-creators with God. And so the fear of sin becomes anguish, lack of faith, and what is more horrible, it becomes sin clothed in false religiosity.

If we forget our responsibility to keep re-creating a world that has been partially put in our artisanal hands and prefer to keep an account of our merits before God, even if we fulfill all the precepts of all the commandments, we will be sinning. Because we have not been created to that end, we would be failing to respond to God's creative intention for us humans. Between these two extremes, the obsession with guilt on the one hand and the apathy that leads to leaving things as they are, on the other, there exists the space in which God wants for us humans.

No human can be so sinful so that evil may turn out to be a temptation in itself. In general, our answers which we often take, are customary, poor, easy, or desperate; we deceive ourselves and perceive them as realizations of good, which can result in the greatest and most monstrous aberrations of any human behavior.

In short, human beings have two alternatives:

(a) focusing on himself, which is what Paul calls **"letting himself be carried away by the desires of the flesh"**, (Gal 5:19-21), that is, human frailty, whose path begins with the greed for riches, that continues in the pursuit of honor and is crowned with our pride (Spiritual Exercises No. 142), with the result of human actions that simply tend to devour humans.

(b) or self-donation, from which the fruits of the Spirit emerge: **"love, joy, peace, patience, affability, kindness, fidelity, meekness, self-control"**, (Galatians 5:22), whose milestones are poverty, self-contempt, and humility (Spiritual Exercises No. 146).

Our sinful reality has an incredibly positive aspect, believe it or not, which has been clearly highlighted in the Gospels: The Redemption that has taken place in Christ for all mankind.

**"I am a sinner, who will deliver me from this condition?"**, (Romans 7:25).

**To dig deeper, please see these resources:**

- Appendix Two. "St. John the Baptist, a man in crisis."
- Appendix Three. "To grow in disappointment".



A VIEW FROM  
**THE SPIRITUAL**  
PERSPECTIVE.



## A view from the Spiritual perspective

### Reviewing deep into the sea of our life).

Knowing ourselves unconditionally loved by God opens us to gratitude and a desire to take care of all the gifts that have been given to us. Discovering that life and everything in it is a huge gift for which we have not done anything to merit them, and no retribution is expected, opens in us a desire for gratitude that instills in us the desire to be custodians of these gifts. The awareness of the gift invites us to a loving care and therefore the recognition of all those times when we neglected what has been given to us.

This awareness opens within the human heart a dynamic in which the person recognizes the gift and is grateful for it. In addition, the human realizes from the value of what is received and the love of the One who gives it, how we have not always been faithful to the care of such a precious gift. And it is not intended to be a guilty exercise about the things we have done wrong, or a list of sins or faults like the ones we make as a shopping list or a summary of our debts. Rather it is when we see with a grateful heart and look at so much good received that we recognize that we have neglected the gifts, depriving ourselves of enjoying them fully and depriving other brothers and sisters of those same gifts for having denied them for our service due to our fragility, carelessness, negligence, malice and other acquired disorders.

This is not an intellectual exercise only, but an exercise of our human reason illuminated by the grace of the Father. That is why we must ask the Lord to enlighten us, to give us grace to look at the love with which we are cared for by Him and to see our indifference we respond to that very love. Thus, the journey through our infidelities to the good received must be done by the hand of the Father, and under His gaze and guidance, asking Him to show us with the help of His light that in which we must grow in fidelity and care for our good and that of our brethren.

It is therefore an exercise done in the presence of God, a session of prayer that seeks the encounter with the Lord. Under the influence of the Father's grace and light, we will be able to go through what we want to examine, a review of our day or part of it, such as: an activity, an encounter, a conversation, or the daily examination of conscience at the close of the day. We will review from the heart all the lived experiences again, watching these as in a film, as one who asks for an "account from of the soul", so that he may bring those experiences back to the present and see with the eyes of the heart, how his day has elapsed and recognize it as God sees it. While discovering in that review those moments when we have neglected what has been freely given to us and causing harm to others, to ourselves and to the created world.





For example, neglecting those who have needed us and neglecting to serve them, carelessly throwing trash, not taking proper care of our health, holding idle conversations that make us lose our happiness, keeping ourselves from the joy of an encounter with loved ones due to work anxieties, and finally not giving ourselves time for prayer.

It will be appropriate, as the case maybe, that you make notes of what you want to be thankful for because you recognize it as the gift of the Lord and write down the way you care, the way you make things come to fruition, what you take advantage of, or do good for others with what you have received. So too, notice how you stop doing it by neglecting the good God does for you. This kind of annotations will help you make an account of and calibrate your heart, narrowing the space for the weakness of our memory and forgetting the fruit of this prayer in the process of the exam.

The human heart that has entered the clarity of "its own truth" in the light of grace and in the eyes of God, will desire to ask for forgiveness and help. The truth about oneself frees us because it makes us transparent to the Lord from whom we cannot keep secrets. The heart's willingness to show itself as it is before his Creator not only "relieves" and "removes burdens", but makes us gain in intimacy, strengthens our bond with He who, even with our frailties, bets on us and trusts in the good entrusted to us, for He does the work of cultivating it and making it grow.

After asking for forgiveness and entrusting yourself to the One who loves and will continue to love you, prepare to restart on the path of caring for, growing, and sharing the gifts received from God. This desired outcome will open you to receive the grace that gives you strength to resume the journey of life.

The examination of conscience calibrates or tunes our heart by bringing it into the wavelength, or tuning it with the Creator's gaze for us which is ultimately the only look that puts Truth in our hearts, enhances our talents, and restores the damage we caused due to our frailties and sin.

### **To know the movements of our spiritual inner self.**

Entering the life of prayer, starting a spiritual path is not harmless. From the first steps we will notice that there are spiritual movements in us. That is, we will begin to experience changes in our feelings, thoughts that appear and then disappear, other feelings that are more persistent, concerning our desires and inclinations. The inner spiritual world has its own life and that life is evident in what in spiritual traditions we call spiritual movements. That is why it is important and good to be aware of them, in other words, to recognize them and distinguish what type of information each of them



gives us. All feelings are expressed with a different meaning, and that specific meaning directs us or tilt us differently, and usually lead us to make different decisions.

These inner spiritual movements are necessary for our spiritual health and we can gain some learning from all of them. The important thing is to interpret their meaning correctly so that we can properly make use of them to cultivate our friendship with the Lord.

There is a first group of inner spiritual movements that we tend to perceive as thoughts or feelings as people progress in their spiritual lives. This happens when we have decided to take seriously a path of friendship with Jesus and we set out to cultivate the encounter with Him in prayer, and, in everyday life, our attitudes become more like his own. Two other kinds of inner spiritual movements we will then warn you about, those who come from the "enemy of our human nature or bad spirit" that lurks in us and that will put obstacles and stone barriers on the way so as not to let us advance in our spiritual life. This impediment will attempt to force us to act in ways that make us give up on our good intentions and lure us away from Jesus. They will be manifested as thoughts that tell us that we have started a difficult, if not impossible, path in which we will not be able to persevere, or make us perceive the path as useless, or any similar thought that will make us take a detour in this way of discerning, tempts us to lock ourselves in or even isolate ourselves from others. This kind of thoughts will generate discouragement and hopelessness in the proposed spiritual journey. On the contrary, the good spirit will prompt us to continue, to seek help if things are difficult for us, to overcome obstacles by looking at the achievements and advances and not center alone on the difficulties, to trust that if Jesus has called us, He will assist us along the way. They will be feelings that give us encouragement and thoughts imbued with optimism that will open us to new life.

There is a second group of inner spiritual movements that occur in the soul of those who have become stagnant or have not taken their spiritual growth seriously. In these cases, the evil spirit facilitates the steps for our distancing ourselves from our Lord's invitation, as if oiling the bottom of the toboggan slide causing it to go down the wrong way. The evil spirit stokes laziness, encourages a comfortable life without prayer, leads to low and sensual pleasures, along with the satisfaction of disorderly sensual appetites. The good spirit acts instead in the opposite direction, it causes our consciousness to listen actively by pinching it, or by creating feelings of remorse to get it back on the track of a spiritual renewal.



Taking note or writing down what we are discovering helps us to learn how to recognize these inner spiritual movements. It also helps to identify the circumstances in which we feel them, what happens to us each time, what we feel inclined to do, or act. For what? For it is not only a question of recognizing and realizing the different type of feelings, but also of accepting those spiritual motions that bring us closer to the life of the Holy Spirit and gives us courage to discard or throw away those that take us away from our spiritual journey.

It is more like recognizing how to enter into the language of the life of the Spirit, to be listening to those spiritual movements that give us life, and to be receptive to the invitations of the inner spirit and follow them, discarding what we will recognize as not coming from the good spirit.

### **To dig deeper. Resources. Appendix One. "The Heavy Soul".**

#### **Review of the sudden changes experienced by the soul.**

##### **John Cassian.**

John Cassian, Father of the Church that lived in the desert of Egypt in the 4th century, introduced the main orientations of the Eastern monastic tradition to the Western world. His writings on prayer and spiritual discernment had a great impact then and still are the basic teachings followed and used as an example for modern Spiritual Writers.

In the narrative that we propose this author presents, with language and images of his time, the dynamics of spiritual discernment, that is, the inner spiritual movements that open us to the Spirit of the Lord, to new life in the Spirit, and those dynamics that will be an obstacle.

Keep in mind that the biblical and sapiential tradition tells us that inner spiritual movements come from influences outside of us, such as, things that we see, hear, perceive and that tend to affect us. It is what in this same tradition is called "good spirit" and "bad spirit," which open us to life or lead us to death. However, so-called good and evil spirits are NOT identified with the Lord and the devil, the prince of evil. That is, it is not a struggle between God and the devil, for the Creator is Almighty and has already overcome evil. The devil, Satan, which also means the adversary, the father of lies, is identified by the spiritual traditions, as being only a creature, that cannot rival God.

In our inner, spiritual combat, we will experience inner forces (typical in our psychology) and others that come from external influences (as good and bad spirits)



are always at play. The Spirit of the Lord supports the influence of the "good spirit" on us, for it leads us to new life and freedom, but He does not identify Himself with either the "good spirit" nor the "bad spirit", which always moves us into slavery, and can be influenced by the devil.

"On one occasion we ask this blessed Daniel: Why is it that sometimes, finding ourselves in our cells, we feel our hearts filled with immense joy, and, amid this ineffable joy, we feel like we are invaded by a barrage of spiritual feelings and lights? This is such a phenomenon that it cannot be translated into words. Even the mind feels incapable of conceiving it. In these circumstances, our prayer is pure and extremely easy. The soul, filled with the spiritual fruits, knows this feeling as instinctively part of our moments of prayer, prolonged at times even during our sleep, and elevates us with great ease and efficiency to experience the presence of God.

But it also can be the case that, suddenly, and without any cause for which we are at least aware, we feel prey to the deepest sorrow. It is a sadness that overwhelms us and whose motive we try in vain to search and find the cause. The source of this mystical experiences is suddenly questioned. Even the cell we inhabit becomes little less than unbearable. The Spiritual Reading causes disgust in us, and our prayer goes wandering and errant, it becomes faulty and is decayed, as if we were victims of drunkenness. Then here come the wails and inner anguish. We attempt to go backwards and imprint in our inner spirit the first direction, but uselessly. The more we attempt to lead our inner spirit back to contemplation, the more it seems to slip out of our hands and run down the path of flightiness and inconstancy. The mind at this point is devoid of all spiritual fruit, and such is its infertility, that neither our desire of heaven nor the fear of hell is enough to awaken it from this mortal dream and shake it from its lethargy.

The Abbot says this of our experience: Our elders taught us that there were three causes that could lead to that spiritual infertility which you are talking about.

Sometimes it may be an inevitable consequence of our own negligence; other times, it could be a temptation from the devil; and, in short, it may also be a test to which the Lord will submit us. First, it will be a sequel to our negligence when, knowingly, we give free passage to the coolness in our souls. This is when we act recklessly and mindlessly, we proceed in everything without a care. To these symptoms are added the indifference and our hesitations, proper environment for our evil thoughts that nourish our minds. From this moment on our hearts are like a bare, parched soil in which nothing but rubbish and thorns germinate. And when these weeds start to sprout, of course we become barren. It is then useless then at this moment to attempt



to harvest new spiritual fruits, let alone aspire to a fruitful contemplation.

But it is also possible that the soul feels empty because of a response to temptation, in which case the enemy glides deftly in our inner spirit without us being able to perceive it. It does not matter that we are engaged entertaining wholesome thoughts or doing holy chores: the temptation demands of our attention and promptly proceeds to distance us, falsely and without any complicity, from our best desires, and even from the most excellent thoughts and intentions.

Finally, this dryness of the soul can come from God, and then the motive can be double.

First, it is to our advantage that we should feel abandoned by Him for some time so we could experience our natural weakness. Also, assuming too much our feelings of humility, we became conceited by the purity of heart with which we had previously been graced by the Lord's visit. In this state of isolation in which God leaves us, we realize that neither the inner groans nor our natural ability can make us recover that first state of optimism and purity. We will understand, at the same time, that our fervor was not the fruit of our efforts, but a gift of divine providence. For this same reason, we still need to implore, now, His grace and His light.

Secondly, we must seek the reason for this abandonment from God in the fact that He desires to prove by this means our perseverance. We must give Him proof of the eagerness and fortitude of our souls. It also seeks to manifest to us with what longing and with what tenacity we must ask in prayer for the visit of the Holy Spirit, when He has abandoned us to our misery. Finally, He wants us to recognize from our experience how difficult it is to regain, once lost, the spiritual joy and the happiness that the purity of the heart brings with it. Hence the urgency with which we must keep spiritual joy when we have found it again. Because we are usually very negligent in guarding what we believe can be easily recovered.

All this offers us a certainty that it is divine grace and mercy that operates in us for all good, and that without Divine help our diligence is useless. If we do not have His help, any effort on our part to return to that original state is in vain. The word of Scripture is fulfilled incessantly in us: "It is not the work of the one who desires, nor of the one who runs the race, but of the mercy of God".

However, sometimes it is a whole different thing that happens. God does not forsake to visit us with His grace, even despite the negligence and carelessness in which He sees our hearts immersed. And He does it through that holy inspiration you were



talking about. Nor does He have less desire to create in us an abundance of spiritual thoughts and feelings. As unworthy as we may be, He arouses in our souls holy inspirations, awakens us from our drowsiness, enlightens us in the blindness in which our ignorance has led us, and rebukes us and punishes us instead with His mercy. But He does more, He is ever present in our hearts, so that at least His divine touch will move us to remorse and make us shake ourselves from the inertia that paralyzes us.

Finally, it is not an exceptional thing that when the Spirit of God visits us, we feel suddenly flooded with the smell of certain sweet perfume, that with its softness outbids all that human art and creativeness can conceive and realize. Then the soul, immersed in this ocean of happiness, feels enchanted and out of its own environment, until it loses the notion of existence and forgets that it dwells in the flesh."



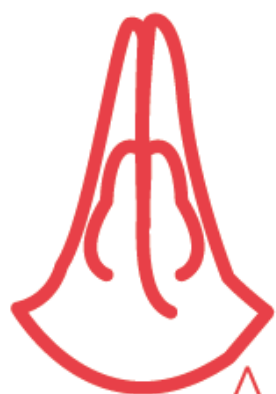
A VIEW FROM  
**THE POPE'S**  
PERSPECTIVE.



## A view from the Pope's writings

"One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12:9). Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil. The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds; it is the fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust." (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 85).





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



## A View from the Perspective of Prayer

### Awakening to the inner world that inhabits us.

*"Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour. "It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them" (Matthew 25:13-14).*

Today there is much talk of "living consciously," of living "the here and the now" or of acquiring an attitude that allows us to "live with a full awakening." Such an interest, which arises from Eastern spirituality and the rediscovery of our own spiritual tradition, is taking place because we realize that we live without knowing where the real change we want to see take place in us and the world is coming from.

Jesus invites us to be vigilant, to pay attention, to be attentive to his Presence in us and to take care of our hearts. We live very "distracted," inattentive to what is happening within us. This causes us not to be aware of the choices we make, the words we speak, and the attitudes with which we live. We easily criticize others and emphasize their mistakes, but we do not stop to examine and be vigilant about what we say and do.

When we pray we develop a greater ability to understand and weigh what is happening inside and around us. Prayer makes us understand inner spiritual realities that would otherwise remain hidden within us without a prayer practice. Awakening internally to the inner spiritual dynamics that inhabit our interior is the condition for a possibility to love freely and without conditions. We must pay more attention to what we are committed to in our lives.

Being "attentive" means being awake and watching our heart. We need to pay more attention to changes in our moods and thoughts that disturb and sicken the soul as well as the manifestations of the Spirit of God that bring us peace, joy, hope, and love. If we are attentive to what is happening within us, we develop greater ability to hear and follow Jesus' voice.

In this second step of the Way of the Heart we need to recognize, that we all together are Children of God, and yet we might harbor in us inner dynamics that contradict that reality. Some of those dynamics are the diverse voices we hear inside us, who invite and seduce us to nurture a self-centered life to the detriment of others. We must be incredibly careful not to judge harshly our behaviors, our actions, and ways of proceeding, and we must first recognize ourselves as persons loved by God. One who feels loved is naturally called to make changes in his or her life. In the monastic



tradition, and in particular the Oriental fathers of the Church in this spiritual tradition, we are invited, to take care of the soul, our heart. St Ignatius of Loyola, echoing this recommendation proposes the practice of the examination of conscience each day – daily rereading- reviewing of our behaviors and dealings with others, as a tool to discover the voice of the good Spirit in our hearts, listen and be open to receive its motions (inner or spiritual movements) and specially to recognize the voice of the evil spirit to reject his invitations.

### **Exercise - Practice of the spiritual review.**

#### **Deepening the second half of rereading.**

##### **Light and Forgiveness.**

In the light of the Lord's love I look at everything that encloses me, saddens, dries, divides, all that is rejection of love. It is not a question of making a list of my sins here or a form of inner inquisitive research, but of identifying, as a simple observation, without judgment on my part, what encloses me, what takes me away from the Creator and my brothers and sisters and takes away my life, of identifying the place of spiritual combat. This is the place where the Lord calls me to move forward so that I can open more to life. For sin separates from GOD, He who is the source of life. I can ask His forgiveness and accept His mercy.

*“Gracious is the LORD and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The LORD protects the simple; I was helpless, but he saved me. Return, my soul, to your rest; the LORD has been particularly good to you. For my soul has been freed from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I shall walk before the LORD in the land of the living”* (Psalm 116:5-9).

#### **Practice of thematic rereading.**

##### **Fears and attachments.**

We propose you to exercise a particularly demanding exam.

Remember that it is a time of prayer, so that you are looking for a quiet time, a place secluded from interruptions and silence.

Enter the presence of the Creator, who looks at you and awaits you, for a new encounter with you.

Thank the Lord for some special grace you have received in this time, continue thanking and liking God's gift.

Ask God for grace to help you see those fears and attachments that influence your relationships.

Ask the Lord to show you what things really make you afraid. Remember that the deepest fears are covered, it is difficult to see them (fear of loneliness, death, sickness, failure, not being loved, not being accepted, condemnation, feeling empty, etc.). Take note of what you find out.

Ask the Lord again to show you that which binds your freedom, that reality to which you are clinging. It can be a person, a pain you don't let go of, a place, a situation. These are things that hold you back and that take away your freedom of thought and action, that catch your attention and to which your heart is fixed. Attachments enslave you and enslave others. Take some time for your heart to dictate and take note.

Offer to the Lord what you have discovered so He could tell you His point of view on it. The Lord will speak to your heart. Ask God for forgiveness for these frailties and imagine what tomorrow would be like if you did not act under these influences.

Ask God to grow in you the desire for inner freedom to be more available to His Love.



THE HUMAN HEART  
IS RESTLESS  
AND NEEDY



**RESOURCES**

## Resources

### Appendix One

#### The heavy soul.

To a large extent, the lack of inner spiritual fullness (or happiness), with which we live today, is because we have a "heavy soul". We overload our own lives with too many things that are most often not even useful. These do not make us better people. We find it difficult to recognize that our happiness or total fullness is not in what we have or possess. The heaviness in the soul is due to the existing situations that remain to be resolved. It may happen that when we are silent, internal voices appear demanding our attention. Maybe that is why we are looking for a way to silence our inner voices. We knock ourselves out doing endless things to avoid answering the internal nagging question that would help us get out of the situation we are in; for instance, "Who am I?" Why is it important to answer this question? Because our identity is not given by what we materially possess, but by where we come from and where we are invited to journey in our life. Because knowing who we are is how we can better understand our destiny and the meaning of our existence.

There are persons that we know, or even ourselves, who are afraid of their own interiority. They are internally terrorized to confront themselves, to see themselves as they are presently feeling. They think that if they keep silent, they will only hear their own complaints inside themselves, and that is a lie. Within us, there is a voice that we need to hear, and it is the voice that says, "You are my beloved son" (Mark 1:11). Imagine how different our life could be if we would stop escaping from ourselves...! Imagine again how different our story would be if we stopped looking outside ourselves for what we need to discover within...! If we encouraged ourselves to listen more, rather than talk too much, perhaps we could understand better that those words the Father addressed to Jesus was for all mankind: "You are my beloved son." When we dare recognize ourselves as children of God, we will stop living as orphans with homes.

### Appendix Two

#### St. John the Baptist. A crisis man.

Which one of us has not ever been through a "difficult" situation in our lifetime? Who has not ever experienced this "strange," foreign sense of failure? On more than one occasion we have seen our plans, projects, desires, etc. be interrupted or totally broken. And when it happens to us, we sink into sadness, or become belligerent and aggressive. Why might we ask? Because these are times when we thoroughly experience our own helplessness. When things do not go as we wished or planned,

and so, we are faced head-on with our own limitations. Can a difficult situation help us grow and mature as persons, as individually unique as created by God? Can we instead capitalize on our "unpleasant situations" and turn them around to work in our favor? The answer is an emphatic, Yes! But before we can do that, we must not settle into grief, self-pity, or incriminatory regrets.

Our crises are like hinges that open and close bad moments in our lives. They are thresholds that give way to a new and, surely different, way of perceiving ourselves and our present confused reality. The decisive thing about crises is that they force us to open our eyes to a specific presently felt reality and not to deny it. In short, crises are those experiences we run into and that allow us to correct, amend, redefine, redirect, etc., our daily life. John the Baptist was a man of crisis as portrayed in the Scriptures. He was sent by God to confront the crisis the people of Israel were facing and awakened in the process many drowsy people in his time. In John's words, crisis is an opportunity for conversion of the heart. An invitation to take seriously our renewal of the mind and heart. An instance or a call to look at our own reality and ask ourselves if we are being truly authentic in our relationship with God and others.

The crisis that John presented to the people of Israel became a challenge to expose the injustices in their legalistic approach and a call to revoke the extreme applications of their code of law. He showed that one can be law-abiding and yet be unjust. He denounced the existing practice that behind the masquerade of religiosity were hidden greed and desire for power alone. He showed them that religion when perverted causes enormous harm to people. John's preaching exposed many wolves in sheep's clothing. He strongly condemned those who boasted of being deeply religious in their temples, but then behaved cruelly externally with others. John's words were a sharp sword that penetrated the marrow of religion of his time and exposed their need for inner renewal. Sometimes God arouses inside us a John the Baptist who "complicates, who makes the comfortable uncomfortable" in our lives and times. They are those people who make us see that we have fallen asleep on our fancy outlook that is covered in illusion. They are people who question us and make us discover the need we have for a conversion of heart.

### **Appendix Three**

#### **To Grow while experiencing dissolution.**

"I think being disappointed about someone or even you is not so bad after all. Moreover, I am inclined to think that sometimes it is good for it to happen. Maybe it is the necessary step –even if forced? - although not the only alternative, to discover the mystery of each human being and resolve to seek more authentic relationships. Someone may disappoint us because they have broken a promise, betrayed a

friendship, or were not truthful, but I am not referring to this type of disappointment, which we know hurts deeply. I am talking about the disappointment that comes from checking our ego itself that many times thinks it knows everything, desiring to be right in everything, and controlling everything. Our ego itself demands others to be as we imagine them. Our ego seeks to make others conform to what our personal requirements, demand and need. Like Procrustes - Greek myth - his ego pretends that all others act in the measure He imagines them. If their actions do not fit his expectations, he "stretches" them, but they become too big for his liking, he "trims" them. Therefore, the disappointments we occasionally experienced are not always the responsibility of the other, sometimes it is ours for wanting to play with others, for not respecting the identity of the other, the mystery that is the other, for not having had a sincere desire to discover who the other person really is. So, the next time you say "you let me down" check that You are not playing Procrustes.

Yes, it hurts when you realize, that someone did not have an authentic interest in knowing you. He or she was not interested in discovering you as a unique and unrepeatable person, but was looking for you to be who he or she wanted you to be, the model of person he had imagined you to be. We tend to project on others what we want them to be for us, forgetting who they really are. We often carry upon others and others do so upon ourselves, desires, longings, demands, dreams, pretending to shape each other as a "wax doll," to meet personal expectations. How many relationships or bonds have we broken because we don't know how to give up the fantasy of turning others into an object? He who is a traitor is not the one who is claimed not to have met self-centered expectations, but the one who said, "you are important to me", without even the slightest real interest to discover the beauty that exists in the other. It's sad to hear, after a while, someone tell you "you let me down," and then check that they do so because you didn't want to stop being yourself in order to meet their own expectations.

Sometimes I wonder if we do not keep imagining "fantasy friends," as we did in childhood, and dialogue with the image we have created of each other in an unhappy monologue. How difficult it is to grow in authentic and lasting bonds respecting the mystery each person is! Those who are unwilling to let others be will find it hard to meet someone to love truly and be genuinely loved in return. Because to love is to let the other person be and, in expressing that mystery, help each other bring out the best version of ourselves. We must take care of the evil ego that believes he or she has the power to play "being god" by cutting others according to their egotistical desires. In the mystery of the person, we discover the beauty of the Creator. Let us attempt to find the true God.

**Original : Spanish**



THE HUMAN HEART  
IS RESTLESS  
AND NEEDY

**STEP 2**  
BOOK 4

