

## Points to Ponder

Bishop Francois Fenelon (1651-1715) was a French Bishop who spent some time in the court of King Louis XIV tutoring the King's grandson. After leaving the court he was written to by some of the young people still at court seeking his spiritual guidance. He was aware of the context in which these people lived – a world characterized by power grabs, self-promotion and a willingness to give one's self to any whim or passing desire, not much different from our world. This collection of letters has been paraphrased to be more understandable to the modern reader.

### Sunday

Listen to me with this. Believe it. I know that when you taste this truth, it will seem bitter, but if you will hear it, it will feed your heart well. You will need to die to yourself, the ultimate impoverishment. But this death is the only true life, the only way to be filled. Trust what I am saying. Don't listen to your protective voice. That voice is the grand seducer, more powerful even than the serpent that deceived our mother Eve. That voice coddles you into being afraid to risk what God requires. Trust me: you will find happiness if you simply listen to and obey the other voice.

### Monday

True love finds pleasure when it is giving to, suffering for, someone it deeply loves; and we are suffering for God. This cross and this suffering make us more like God. Deep pleasure and intimacy come from being bonded to God in this way.

### Tuesday

This is my prayer for you: that God will weaken your self-obsessed spirit more than he weakens your body. I pray that God will give your body all the care and comfort it needs, but I also pray that God will entirely crush your internal addiction to self. We are actually just coming to a place of strength when we begin to see how weak and anemic we truly are. When we see our feebleness, then we can begin to see where we have run off course. We can begin to repent and change. We can actually receive wise, helpful words from others, words we were unwilling to hear before. We can stop thinking we have all the answers. We can abandon the foolish arrogance of assuming we always know what is best for ourselves.

### Wednesday

Stop trusting in your own mental and physical power. Stop trusting that you can figure God out or that you can manhandle your spiritual life, pushing and dragging it across some supposed finish line of maturity. If you just stop all the wrestling and resisting and harried effort, you will find yourself on your way to becoming who God has in mind for you to be.

I know you give lots of energy to all the heady or difficult virtues you think you should pursue. However, these are the virtues you really need: humility and self-distrust.

### Thursday

Here's how you can start releasing control: Be humble and simple, whether you are around the power brokers, (the very sort of people that make you want to keep track of how well you are doing) or alone, with nobody to impress but yourself. Don't make any decision because it's what is expected or because it's what makes sense or because it just seems like it's what you want to do. That's illusion stuff. Rather, make every decision an act of listening to another voice: the Spirit of God. And then, after you've listened and heard, obey.

### Friday

There are also those who appear spiritually awakened, but this spiritual awakening is only skin deep, a deception. When we encounter someone with a little fire or fresh perspective, we can easily mistake the energy for true spiritual fervor. Here's how to tell if you are running up against a sham: you will notice the person always on the move, frenetically running after some supposed good. What they sprint after will always be external, though, not a quiet work in the soul. Yet they will insist on the chase. Obsessed, they will forever try to figure out how to make this external (supposed) good come to fruition. They forever talk about it. They forever try to figure out every nuance and strip every mystery. In the end, they might capture plenty of facts, but they won't know much about God. They won't know about quietness, a peace, in the soul. They won't know how to listen to God.

### Saturday

There is a straightforward way to know if you are growing in conversing with God. If your prayers are becoming more simple and if your conversation requires less (fewer words, fewer worries), then you are moving into deeper ways of prayer. Conversation with God is friendship. Like any friendship, when it first starts out, there are a thousand things to talk about as you get to know one another. However, after a while, as the friendship deepens, there are fewer facts to discover about the other. The words are fewer, but the pleasure in being together is as rich as ever. There is little to say, but there is still deep joy. You know a sign of good friendship, don't you? —when you can be silent together and it isn't awkward. You just sit quietly, with nothing to say. And it is good.