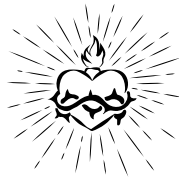


A **PRAYER COMPANION** INSPIRED BY **FRANCIS DE SALES'**
WORK ON GENTLENESS WITH **JANE DE CHANTAL**
TO ACCOMPANY THE NOVEL **JANEY**

Gentleness

WITH JANE AND
FRANCIS





INDEX

Welcome to the index. Let me introduce you to some of my dear friends, Jane and Francis.

This index is a compilation of Jane and Francis' most historically accurate fictionalized interactions in the novel *Janey*. It's compiled to invite you deeper into the primary source writings of Saint Francis de Sales (and Saint Jane de Chantal, though many of her letters have been lost.) Think of it as me guiding you through the pages of *Janey*, saying "*Oh, and this is why Francis said this to Jane here!*"

Go through the pages here, find the reference in the novel, and take some time to let Francis the character merge with Saint Francis, the real Doctor of the Church. His wisdom & insights have blessed me so much, and I pray they touch your heart too.

My prayer is that after exploring & praying with the content provided here, you'll have a deeper understanding of these saints & you'll be "off the training wheels", ready to plunge into Francis' writings yourself without intimidation!

PS: The "Live Jesus" and the "LJ" on the top of each page of this index are a nod to Francis, who apparently wrote that on every sheet of paper he used. (He, as you can expect from a spiritual director of MANY, a bishop who wasn't able to travel to his own diocese, and an author, wrote *extensively*.)



CHAPTER 15

PAGE 143

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 3 CHAPTER 9

In the novel: Francis instructs Jane for how to speak to her own heart. Words italicized midway down page.

This teaching is one of the main ‘veins’ of this writing: gentleness with others and with oneself. Francis writes here about anger. He recommends against *scolding* your heart for wrongdoing, or speaking harshly to yourself. Instead, he asks you to speak gently to yourself, understanding that you’re loved by God. He actually wants you to be *comfortable* in your imperfection: fully aware that you’re an imperfect creature who is bound to sin and fail. The part of our hearts that is surprised and indignant at ourselves is the problem: that’s pride.

He writes instructions how to talk to your heart: “*Alas my poor heart, here we are, fallen into the pit we were so firmly resolved to avoid! Well, we must get up again and leave it forever. We must call on God’s mercy and hope that it will help us to be steadier in the days to come. Let us start out again on the way of humility. Let us be of good heart and from this day be more on guard. God will help us; we will do better.*”

The whole of Chapter 9 is worth the read here. It’s beautiful, and intimate...and shocking! Our knee-jerk reaction to our own imperfection is often inner rage and shame. “Why are you the way you are? Why did you do that? You should be ashamed of yourself! You’re horrible!” This is our inner dialogue. But why? Francis says it doesn’t help anything, but rather adds sin to sin.

REFLECT

- How do you talk to your own heart when you mess up?
- Who taught you to talk like that?
- Do you believe the voice of God is condemning?
- If you do talk to yourself harshly, does that *help* your heart?
- Why is it okay to be gentle with ourselves?



CHAPTER 17

PAGE 183+

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 1 CHAPTER 5,
PART 3 CHAPTER 1 & CHAPTER 6

In the novel: Francis and Jane have a conversation about perfectionism.

In a big way in her life, Francis challenged Jane on her perfectionism. His direction made her shift the posture of her heart towards God. Before meeting him, she was under the spiritual direction of another priest who imposed severe penances on her. Even though she had a mystical vision of Francis and was told he was to direct her spiritually (talk about a sign from God!), she had a hard time letting go of the severe spiritual director. She did not want to fail or give up on holiness, and felt the desire to “achieve” what the old director was asking of her. Francis’ much gentler approach to direction challenged her view of being perfect. He encouraged her to know the Bridegroom Jesus he knew, and his own past struggles of scrupulosity really influenced his direction of her. He wanted to guard her heart against perfectionism, and he shepherded her towards freedom.

He writes, *“Do not then let us be disheartened by our imperfections,—our very perfection lies in diligently contending against them, and it is impossible so to contend without seeing them, or to overcome without meeting them face toe face. Our victory does not consist in being insensible to them, but in not consenting to them.”* *“Moreover, imperfections and venial sins cannot destroy our spiritual life, which is only to be lost through mortal sin; consequently we have only need to watch well that they do not imperil our courage.”* See the Introduction references above for full quotes !

REFLECT

- Do you feel you’re trying to earn God’s love through being perfect and blameless?
- Are you comfortable with your own imperfections, and know that God loves you no matter what?
- Do you “worship” the “false idol” of perfectionism or austerity or holy habits - while missing the person of Jesus himself?
- Do you do the right things externally, while internally feeling very far from the Lord?



CHAPTER 19

PAGE 204

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 1 CHAPTER 2

Additionally, details from Dr. Wendy Wright's biography of Jane and Francis confirm this

In the novel: Francis asks Jane to stop all of her penances when he first becomes her director.

When Francis took Jane on as a spiritual directee, she already had a lot of penances & austere habits from her old spiritual director. Though he would later assign her penances of his own, Francis started by *stopping* Jane. He wanted her to re-meet Jesus, and he wanted to make sure her foundational relationship with Jesus was that of love, not fear. In a sense, he “Karate Kid” taught her to love God again, and we can infer that Jane was not a huge fan of his methods. She was comfortable with the disciplines - less so with the gentleness. But through his direction, she was transformed.

REFLECT

- Are there things you do to prove to yourself, God, or others, that you are holy or worthy?
- Do you follow through on ‘holy habits’ out of fear of consequence, or love of God?
- When you pray, do you hear Jesus speak love for you?



CHAPTER 19

PAGE 205

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 2 CHAPTER 13

In the novel: Francis requires only one active thing of Jane at the beginning of their direction: that she says 'Jesus, I love you' when doing something hard and 'Jesus, thank you' when doing something pleasant. *This requirement of Francis to Jane is imagined and not factual.*

Francis writes in Introduction to the Devout Life that using vocal prayer aloud to call the mind to God "*interspersed among all our tasks and duties*" is not difficult and very fruitful. He suggests making a habit out of speaking simple prayers to the Lord throughout the day, and while he prefers that the person speak their own words of love ("such words as love suggests to you at the time"), he also says that memorized or predetermined prayers are helpful too. With this chapter of Introduction in mind, I imagined that he instructed Jane in how to start practicing the habit of calling to mind God's presence. He would have asked her, no doubt, to go about her daily life and work while praying small vocal prayers for love of God. Francis really believed in the beauty and grace of one's life circumstances, and he did not think they needed to be interrupted to encounter God. Keeping your eyes on the Lord during every activity through the day - that's the key.

REFLECT

- When you go about your day, are there any small vocal prayers YOU can add into your vocabulary to lift your mind and heart to God? Can you teach and remind yourself to pray like this through the use of visual aids or phone alarms, until you've got the hang of it?
- Start with the hardest part of your day. Can you set yourself up for prayer at that time - whether it's putting a sticky note on the wheel of your car during rush hour, starting dinner prep with the sign of the cross, or making your morning alarm a song of praise?



CHAPTER 20

PAGE 210

REFERENCES: INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE

PART 2 CHAPTER 21

PART 3 CHAPTER 1 & 13 & 26

PART 4 CHAPTER 2

In the novel: Francis makes two comments: one about bees, and one about Celse. First, Francis did enjoy bees and used bee metaphors throughout his writings. Second, Francis acknowledged how difficult Celse was for Jane in his letters. One example of this is his letter to her dated October 14, 1604. Here, he refers her to read Confessions of Augustine to take solace in how Augustine treated his mother Monica (spoiler: not well!)

CHAPTER 20

PAGE 213

In the novel: Francis says “dear heart”, referring back to his instruction to Jane on how to speak to her heart.

Refer to Chapter 15, page 143 note.

CHAPTER 20

PAGE 216

In the novel: Francis comments that he wants Jane to be free. This is a reference to his letter to her dated October 14, 1604. He says that a soul with true freedom of heart is joyful and not attached to consolations or even preferences. “*We have occasion to practice this freedom whenever things don’t go the way we’d like them to,*” he says. Francis shares this in the context of talking about being detached and free - detached from expectations or desires for certain ways of holiness for ourselves, and attached only to God’s will. This is the freedom Francis wants for Jane. (And this freedom might be repeated throughout the index, because he emphasizes it multiple times!)



CHAPTER 23

PAGE 245

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 1 CHAPTER 19

In the novel: Jane opens the file Francis gave her and is surprised to find the Guide to a General Confession.

Though Francis never explicitly is recorded asking Jane to make a General Confession (or it's simply something they did not write about), Francis' love for General Confession and Jane's history of trauma, scrupulosity, and self-reliance probably made her an excellent candidate for him to recommend this practice.

PAGE 257-258

REFERENCE: OCTOBER 14, 1604 LETTER

In the novel: Francis and Jane talk about John the Baptist.

Francis commends Jane in his letter for the moments in motherhood she's required to "leave God for love of God", just like John the Baptist did. He, though he was the cousin of Jesus, never became a disciple of the Lord. He probably would have LOVED to spend the 3 years with Jesus, but his call was elsewhere: to prepare the way. To be the best man. He left God to love God. Francis shares this in the context of talking about being detached and free - detached from expectations or desires for certain ways of holiness for ourselves, and attached only to God's will.

REFLECT

- Do you feel attached to a particular 'plan of holiness' or vision of your life?
- Even if it's good and holy, are you clinging too tightly to it? Would you be willing to give it up, for love of God?
- Jaques Phillipe in **In The School of the Holy Spirit**, emphasizes that you cannot DIY your way to holiness, but rather you rely on the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Consider checking out his work!



CHAPTER 24

PAGE 275

REFERENCE: SEE BELOW

In the novel: Jane recalls Francis' advice on anger to her in multiple italic thoughts. Each one references a different place in Francis' writings.

"Don't let anger come in, under any circumstances." - Part 3 Ch 8

"Anger is like poison, Jane. Saint Paul was bitten..." -Part 3 Chapter 8

"People who appear as angels but act as devils in their own homes are the worst sort of people." - Part 1, Ch 1 / Part 3 Chapter 8

The whole of chapters 8-9 of part 3 are the best parts in Introduction to address anger. Jane here is assuming Francis will lecture her, which, if she knows him well, she would realize he'd never do. Francis does caution against anger, but never in a shaming, condemning, or harsh way. He sees anger as the symptom of the wound, and adding self-condemnation and control to the situation as detrimental.

REFLECT

- Do you 'put words in God's mouth' the same way Jane does here to Francis, assuming you know the harsh words he will say to you?
- In moments of anger of your own life, do you ever invite God in to see you as you are, or do you try to keep him out while you have this "ugly" part of you on display?



CHAPTER 25

PAGE 291

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 1 CHAPTER 24

In the novel: Francis comments that imperfection can be attributed to personality.

Francis in no way excuses imperfections as “ah, that’s just your personality. That’s how you are!” He argues that getting rid of imperfections is possible, and he urges his reader to do so. However, he does acknowledge that each personality has different imperfections. Comparing one to another is not helpful. He says some people are naturally cheerful, some naturally gloomy, some naturally contradictory, some prone to anger - and he emphasizes that the type of imperfection doesn’t really matter. The pursuit of perfection with God’s grace and “our own labor and care” is worthwhile here!

REFLECT

- Are there any vices that you attribute to your personality and do not seek to remedy? (ie: I’ve always been impatient! It’s because I’m choleric! Or... I’m just a disorganized, messy person. It’s how my brain works.) Let Francis’ words challenge you here that no matter what type of imperfection you harbor, it is still an imperfection keeping you from God.
- Do you find yourself judging your imperfections against others’ imperfections, judging that you or they are worse than the other? Ask God for the grace to “keep your eyes on your own paper” and simply follow his promptings to remedy your own imperfections, without worrying about your neighbor’s.



CHAPTER 25

PAGE 291 (BOTTOM)

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 2 CHAPTER 12 & FRANCIS' LETTER 11/1609 & 2/25/1610

In the novel: Francis asks Jane how “finding God in this hour” of dinner prep is going, and she explains that she’s been putting her hand on an image of Jesus and trying to rest in his wounds, with limited success.

Francis talks about the need to have an “interior closet”, an oratory in your heart to withdraw into throughout the day to spend time with Jesus. In Introduction, he talks about choosing a place to find repose, but in his letters to Jane, he goes deeper. He encourages her to be like John the Beloved Apostle and rest her head on his heart. He (and she, because of him) had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart before it became the Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion that we know today. Fun fact - from the religious order that they started (the Visitation Order), Margaret Mary Alacoque received the visions of Jesus telling her about the Sacred Heart!

This is what Francis writes to Jane in November 1609: *“Oh God! What happiness to be thus embraced and to recline in the bosom of the Saviour. Remain thus, beloved daughter, and like another little one, Saint John, while others are tasting different kinds of food at the table of the Lord, lay your head, your soul and your spirit, in a gesture of utter trust, on the loving bosom of this dear Lord.”* And this is what he writes to her in February 1610: *“I hope that you are resting in the cleft of the turtledove and in the pierced side of our beloved Saviour... How good is this Lord, my beloved daughter! How loving is his Heart! Let us remain here, in this holy abode.”*

REFLECT

- The Song of Songs has a theme that the bride herself is the “garden” of the bridegroom; she is his dwelling place and his repose. In the same way, we are “temples” of the Holy Spirit. This imagery of us resting in Jesus’ heart and wounds flips the typical imagery of us being the resting place of God. Reflect on the intimacy that both images conjure: us resting in him, him resting in us.
- Throughout your day when you become frazzled or stressed, can you teach yourself to retreat into Jesus’ heart instead of defer to self-reliance? What would that look like? Try to return to your last stressful moment and replay it, asking Jesus to show you where you could have chosen to find him.



CHAPTER 25

PAGE 294

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 2 CHAPTER 1 & FRANCIS' LETTER 10/14/1604

In the novel: Francis gives Jane some things to try in order to make her dinner prep hour a little easier. He ends his list of suggestions by reminding her that if she fails, it's alright. She should not be motivated by fear or performance.

Francis' suggestions to a busy mom may not appear practical at first: he suggests that she take an hour of prayer before dinner, or at least start dinner prep in prayer. He suggests that she slow down and take longer to actually cook, and to stop multi-tasking as heavily. This may not be practical or doable for her, he acknowledges, but he wants her to give it a try. This set of advice comes straight from Francis' chapter called the 'Necessity of Prayer'. He is trying to encourage his reader to simply make any and every effort to pray throughout their day. Structured morning prayer is best, he says. Dinner hour prayer is awesome. But if nothing else, just constantly turn your mind back to God in the midst of your duties. True devotion isn't about performing holy actions, but holy actions like vocal prayer CAN get you to the point of it all: presence with God.

I find it important to add here the emphasis Francis places on freedom in his Oct 14 letter to Jane. He writes to her in all capitals, "*DO ALL THROUGH LOVE, NOTHING THROUGH CONSTRAINT.*" He does not operate like her previous spiritual director, who expected obedience no matter how difficult the penance. He wants her to operate out of love for God, and if his suggestions and directions are not working, he does not want her to be afraid or fall into scrupulosity or perfectionism. Together, they will find another solution, if the ones he proposes do not work. His gentleness is on full display here, even though you might have to "squint" to see it through his list of practicals for her.

REFLECT

- When you fail in your personal commitments to your spiritual life, what is your interior reaction? Do you fear failing, or shame yourself? Try to learn Francis' gentleness. Francis would likely not be so hard on you as you are on yourself, and he is simply mirroring Jesus' gentle love.
- Consider the difficult parts of your day when you feel alone and far from God. Like Francis, think about the practicals. What can you try in order to help yourself remember God and stay connected to him throughout your work day?



CHAPTER 25

PAGE 295

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 1 CHAPTER 19 & FRANCIS' LETTER 6/24/1604

In the novel: Francis suggests walking through Jane's examination of conscience before she confesses to another priest. This is actually a point of controversy; allow me to explain!

In this letter, Francis specifically cautions Jane against breaking the seal of confession or sharing what was said in confession. This letter is written early in their spiritual director relationship, and because of the distance between them, he could not be her confessor. It would seem then that Francis would never have her examine her conscience to him aloud, right?

Well, I argue that it makes sense in the story for two reasons:

- 1) Jane hadn't actually confessed these sins yet, so he wasn't asking her to reveal what was said under the seal of confession. That's a different thing.
- 2) Francis was very diligent in working with Jane's scrupulosity. One of the main ways scrupulosity comes out is in what the soul considers a sin, and Francis wanted to correct Jane's notions of what was a sin vs and imperfection. For the sake of storytelling, this was the easiest way to communicate this kind of teaching, though perhaps Francis himself would not condone a practice like this! Take it as creative liberty on my part!

(In Introduction to the Devout Life Chapter 19 Part 1, Francis explains the benefits of General Confession. He tells his reader not to be afraid, and to find relief in telling the Divine Physician what ails us; this kind of mentality assumes that the confessee is telling actual sins and not over-analyzing their behavior.)



CHAPTER 26

PAGE 303

REFERENCE: INTRODUCTION PART 2 CHAPTER 16-17

In the novel: Jane “talks to” the saint pictures that Francis has sent her to put up on her wall.

Francis writes about the lives of the saints as an inspiration and guide for us. *“Just as young nightingales learn to sing in company with the old, so also by our holy associations with the saints let us learn the best way to pray and sing God’s praise,”* he writes. While he does not specifically tell his reader to hang images of the saints or pray in the way the novel depicts, he does emphasize that reading from their writings, looking to them for inspiration and example, and choosing particular ones to have devotion to are all very good and helpful habits.

REFLECT

- Hebrews 11-12 remind us that we are not alone; we are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses”, which certainly involves the saints who have gone before us. Seek community in this cloud of witnesses; hang up images of the saints around your home to remind you that you are not alone!
- Do you have any particular favorite saints? If not, ask God to send you some. Many of my friends have stories of the saints “choosing” them. You can also track down saints by looking for their patronage - the patron of mothers, workers of your career, regions, etc ! Look up biographies and enjoy learning about the lives of these holy men and women. You might just see a mirror of your own life and a roadmap for how to move forward! Heck, you might just write a novel about one or two of them!



CHAPTER 28

PAGE 330

REFERENCE: FRANCIS' LETTER 10/14/1604

In the novel: Francis speaks really endearingly to Jane, and even tells her that when he says the plural words of Mass (let "us" pray), he thinks of her.

I know, this kind of language from a bishop to a widow seems a big scandalous in our 21st century minds. But Francis did affirm Jane like this. He did love her like this. And it was honored by the church. Their friendship was so far above the romantic, scandalous, inappropriate thing you may assume when you see deep affection and admiration. My initial reaction - and perhaps yours too - after reading Francis' words to Jane is, "What? Was he in love?! Is this okay??" But we have to look past our guarded reactions, which inform us that people are untrustworthy and all man-to-woman-admiration will turn into romance, and we have to believe Francis and Jane's purity of heart in their friendship. They loved Jesus so much, and both found themselves wedded to him in their vocations, that they were able to truly love one another deeper and more intimately than most friendships. They loved soul to soul.

Read his words yourself: *"God gave me a tremendous love for your soul...I didn't believe that anything could be added to the affection I felt for you, but now my dear daughter, a new quality has been added. All I can say is that its effect is a great inner delight which I feel whenever I wish you perfect love of God and other spiritual blessings. I am adding nothing to the truth and I speak in the presence of the God of my heart and yours. Every affection differs in some particular way from every other affection; that which I have for you has a certain something about it which brings me great consolation and is extremely good for me. Hold that for the truest truth and have no more doubt about it. To me, it's an amazing fact my daughter that holy Church, in imitation of her Spouse, teaches us to pray, not for ourselves only, but always for ourselves and our fellow Christians. "Give us...", she says, "Grant us..." and similar all-inclusive terms. It had never occurred to me when praying in this general way to think about any person in particular; but since leaving Dijon, whenever I say "we" I think of particularly individuals who have recommended themselves to my prayers; ordinarily you are the one who comes to mind first."*

He also writes in his June 8, 1606 letter, *"Believe me, these decisions owe a lot to your desire. I care intensely about what pleases you and makes you happy, though with a certain liberty and sincerity of heart that makes this caring resemble a dew which falls on my heart softly and silently."*

He also writes in his June 24, 1604 letter, *"I have never understood that there was any bond between us carrying with it any obligation but that of charity and true Christian friendship, what St. Paul calls the bond of perfection. ... So there, dear sister (allow me to call you by this name, which is the one used by the apostles and the other Christians to express the intimate love they had for one another), this is our bond, these are our chains which, the more they are tightened and press against us, the more they bring us joy and freedom."*

He also writes in his January 16, 1610 letter, *"Why am I telling you all this? It's because my heart always expands and pours itself out spontaneously when it's near yours...Believe me that the very first note I wrote you was absolutely true – that God has given me to you. I am more convinced of this in my heart every day."*



CHAPTER 29

PAGE 360

REFERENCE: FRANCIS' LETTER 10/14/1604

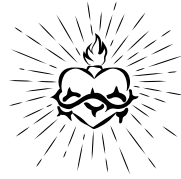
In the novel: Jane confesses her doubt about the Eucharist to Francis, and he tells her to get on the offense using her will against the devil.

Here are Francis' words: *"The temptations against faith go directly to the understanding to draw it to argue, and to get caught up in all these things. Do you know what you should do while the enemy wastes his time trying to scale the walls of your intellect? Slip out the gate of your will and take the offensive against him. That is, when a temptation against faith starts raising questions in your mind such as, 'How can this be? But what if this? What if that...?', instead of debating the enemy with arguments, let your affective side attack him with full force, and even let your thoughts be reinforced by your voice, crying out, 'You traitor! You wretch! You left the Church of the angels, and you are trying to get me to leave that of the saints! ...No, I will not argue with you!'"*

I love this. Francis does not minimize Jane's doubt. He understands her doubt of the Eucharist is a big deal, but he sees it for what it is: a temptation against faith, *not* a sin or a flaw that she tries to harbor. Like his advice to wave away temptation like a bee, he doesn't respond in panic like she does. He doesn't say "Wow, this is a *serious one Jane!*" He simply says, 'This is a temptation. Like any other. Just don't let it get to you.' He seems to see the devil as more of a nuisance than a real threat.

REFLECT

- Do you have doubts about the Eucharist or God that seem to paralyze you or make you ashamed to admit? Jane can relate! But this tactic of doubt from the devil only works if it stops you from intimacy with God. Don't let it get to you. Make a firm act of faith, chase off the devil, and see your doubt for what it is: one of many things that will try to keep you from the love of God.
- What would Francis say to you, if you told him today that you had a secret that you felt was keeping you from the Lord? Harboring a secret grudge, lie, fear, doubt, or sin? Francis would probably be gentler with you than you are with yourself. Imagine a conversation with him, and how he would react.



OTHER REFERENCES

I'm including these other snippets from the letters & Introduction to the Devout Life, not because they were specifically "cited" in my writing, but because they gave me such a sweet understanding of Jane and Francis that I feel I have come to know them in their humanity and sainthood. I hope you enjoy!



ABOUT LITTLE THINGS

June 8, 1606 letter from Francis to Jane. He has just finished telling her that her new desires to become religious are so good, but that they are for later. In a sense, he's telling her to stay present in her current season and embrace what God has for her here. He cares so much about her ordinary vocation, and does not believe in skipping ahead to "holier" seasons of life!

"Meanwhile, you will wield your distaff, not with big, loaded spindles which your fingers couldn't handle, but with small ones that you can manage: humility, patience, abjection, gentleness of heart, resignation, simplicity, charity to the sick poor, forbearance with difficult persons, and similar imitations of the Lord which can easily be wound on your little spindle. Then you will spin in the company of Saint Monica, Saint Paula, Saint Elizabeth, Saint Lydwine, and several others who are at the feet of your glorious Abbess, who herself was able to ply any kind of spindle but preferred smaller ones."

His analogy of spinning is so simple: be satisfied with the small labor on your lap, instead of wanting and reaching for something more. You'll be in the company of many holy saints. Jane is capable of greatness, but she lives a hidden and simple life for a long time. She cares for her children. She runs her household. And it's enough, if she embraces it for what it is.



ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT & PERFECTIONISM

June 8, 1606 letter from Francis to Jane. This letter just makes me laugh. Francis is openly laughing at Jane; he's responding to a letter from her that we don't have anymore. But clearly, in the letter, she is telling him about her sewing/spinning. She shares with him that she's worried she's making too nice things for her children and neglecting the poor. She ought to not make things for her relatives; they are less important than the poor. How selfish she's being by spending her time making them nice things. She's planning to make more for the poor. More altar clothes for the church. She will make amends for the gifts she's given to her relatives. Oh, and she'll make some things for him too and send them along. Oh, and she should make some for her in-laws. He's laughing and telling her, 'Jane, calm down on the sewing.'

"I approve even more that you busy your hands with spinning, for instance, whenever you have nothing more important to do, and that your handiwork be used for altar linens or given to the poor, not that this be adhered to so strictly that if you happen to make something for yourself or for one of your relatives, you should feel obliged to give an equivalent sum to the poor. In all things, holy liberty and freedom must reign and we must have no other law or coercion than that of love. When love moves us to make something for our relatives, we must not reprimand it as if it had done something wrong, or require it to make amends, as you suggest. Whether love invites us to make something for the poor or for the rich, it does all things will and is equally pleasing to Our Lord. After that, I laughed and laughed heartily, when you I read you planned to give me some of your serge for my own use...I'm really not making fun of the suggestion, since I see it springs from a good and clear intention, even if the resulting stream is a bit troubled. ... I'm laughing, my daughter."

I just love this. She's worried - like I am, often - that she's spending her time and energy wrongly, that she's perhaps putting too much effort into her children or neglecting the poor somehow. She's there laboring over gifts for others, and she's questioning her motives and her heart and if she's doing it right. She's stressing and concluding that surely her generosity is misguided, and she will make it right. Francis tells her to calm down, and to trust that generosity to whomever is still pleasing to the Lord. She does not have to draw such strict lines between rich and poor and worthy and unworthy of her gifts.

In the same vein, he also writes in the January 16th letter, "Oh my daughter, how I enjoy talking with you about these things! How happy we are when we want to love our Lord! Let's really love Him, my daughter, and let's not start examining in detail what we are doing for love of Him, as long as we know that we never want to do anything except for love of Him." For me personally, that gives me so much freedom to not question if my daily choices are 'good enough'. Which is better, to take my daughter to the park or to sign up for that meal train? To visit my in-laws this weekend, or to plan a date for my husband? To wake up early to go for a run, or to write more of my novel? To sign my child up for a class, or to take her to the library? If it's done for love of God, in desire to live my vocation well and please him, then option A or B doesn't bear the weight of the decision anymore. I'm free to choose and not overanalyze and worry. My God is not a taskmaster.



ABOUT DRY PRAYER

In the January 10, 1610 letter, Francis responds to Jane about her dry prayer. She is concerned that she can't seem to connect with the Lord, and that she wanders away mentally from being in his presence during times of prayer and times of work. RELATABLE! Here's a snippet of what Francis says, "*A little child who is at its mother's breast when she has fallen asleep is really where it belongs and wants to be, even though neither of them makes a sound.*"

He emphasizes to Jane that it's not her action that pleases God. It's her obedience to where he has her, and if in prayer he says nothing in particular, that's okay. That doesn't take any merit from her prayer time at all. Perhaps she is an infant on her mother's breast, and nothing 'productive' needs to happen at all for bonding.

He writes further about this in his June 28, 1605 letter, in which Jane seems to be complaining of a period of desolation and a lack of desire to do any good thing. For me, this encompasses much of pregnancy. He speaks to her in her poverty of spirit. I'll pull a few snippets, since he writes at length here:

"You are like a child whose guardian does not allow him to spend all of his fortune, and so although the money belongs to him, he cannot touch it. My dearest daughter, how fortunate we are to be this constrained and held back by our Heavenly Guardian! ... All we have to do, undoubtedly, is nothing more than what we are already doing, which is to adore the lovable providence of God and to throw ourselves into His arms and into His keeping. ... "Lord, if it is your good pleasure that I take no delight in practicing the virtues which Your grace has granted me, I accept this most willingly, even though it goes against what my will feels." ... It is the peak of holy resignation to be content with naked, dry, unfelt acts made only by the higher will. ... You are willing to 'endure a living death' ... My dearest daughter, remain thus in the darkness of the Passion."

He writes in his February 11, 1607 letter, "*You would like it to be always spring or summer, but no, my dear daughter, we have to experience interior as well as exterior changes. ... I see that all seasons of the year converge in your soul: at times, you experience all the dryness, distraction, disgust, and boredom of winter.*"

Finally, he writes near the end of his October 14th letter about true freedom, and says that a soul with true freedom of heart is joyful and not attached to consolations. "*We have occasion to practice this freedom whenever things don't go the way we'd like them to,*" he says. The freedom to accept dry prayer and desolation as a gift from God is actually better than consolation itself.



ABOUT BEING INTERRUPTED

Francis seems to value interruptibility and a disposition of peace above an objectively holy routine. I believe he would look at a perfectly holy day: a 5am wakeup, a disciplined workout, a rosary on your knees, a cold shower, a morning prayer executed with the children, a readaloud of the Bible together, etc - and ask, 'But how is your heart?' He is not impressed with austerity. He's going deeper. He's after freedom of heart and actual love of God.

In his October 14th letter, he explains to Jane the picture of freedom he wants for her.

"The heart that enjoys this freedom is not attached to consolations. ... She is not emotionally bound to her spiritual exercises. If she cannot do them because of illness or some emergency, she does not get upset. ... She hardly ever loses her joy. ... She has a great inner serenity, a great gentleness and willingness to yield in everything that isn't sin or an occasion of sin; it's a flexible disposition. ... She will leave her (interrupted) prayer unruffled, gracious toward the person who unexpectedly disturbed her, for to her it's all the same – serving God by meditating or serving Him by responding to her neighbor. ... We have occasion to practice this freedom whenever things don't go the way we'd like them to."

He does caution that this virtue is found in the middle of two extremes: laziness on one end, and constraint on the other. On one hand, we can throw our hands up and say, 'I'm detached! I won't even try to do holy things and say prayers! I'll just love God throughout my day!' There is goodness in routine and in trying to do daily prayer and in committing to things! But on the other hand, we can buckle down and say, 'No matter what, I'm getting this rosary prayed today, and nobody can stop me!' Francis tells us to fall in the middle.

I write about this somewhere else too, but this is where Francis mentions John the Baptist, who was so detached from his own will that he gave up Jesus himself (and being his disciple, spending time with him, etc) in order to do Jesus' will.



ABOUT BEING WHERE GOD CALLS YOU

In the same letter I've mentioned before, January 10, 1610, Francis replies to Jane about some concern she seems to have about staying in the presence of God. She seems to be worried about not seeing fruit, not doing enough, not knowing she's doing the right thing. It seems that Jane - like me - questions if she's doing the right thing often. She wants confirmation and confirmation again that this is truly where God has called her to be. That this is significant and important. That the plan is still on. But God doesn't always provide confirmation. Sometimes he lets us wait, and our love matures in the waiting.

Francis writes to Jane this analogy of the statue: *"If a statue that had been placed in a niche in some room had the ability to speak and were asked, 'Why are you there?' it would answer, 'Because my master, the sculptor, has put me here.' 'Why don't you move about?' 'Because he wants me to be perfectly still.' 'What use are you there? What do you gain by standing like this?' 'I'm not here for my own benefit, but to serve and obey the will of my master.' 'But you don't see him.' 'No, but he sees me and is pleased that I am here where he has put me.' 'But wouldn't you like to be able to move about and to get closer to him?' 'No, not unless he ordered me to.' 'Isn't there anything at all that you want then?' 'No, because I am where my master put me, and all my happiness lies in pleasing him.'"*

Oh my goodness, how refreshing to my heart is this little analogy about the statue! It dissolves my rigorous, duty-flavored, need-to-measure-it drive to serve God and build the kingdom and make the impact and save the souls. These things are part of the Great Commission; we cannot forget them; we are called to them! Yes and yes and yes! But Heaven forbid that our hearts change posture from the Marian "Your will be done," to the prideful, "God needs me to do this mission or the Kingdom will fall apart. I had better not slack, because it rests on my shoulders to save the world." Walking that line between an urgent hunger for souls to be saved and a detachment from our own idea of holiness and sanctity is essential. We have to trust God. We have to follow where he leads. If that's being the statue that inspires awe and wonder in the centerpiece of the cathedral, so be it! And if that's being the statue in the hallway that nobody sees, so be it. Remember that Francis de Sales is one of the most influential saints in his legacy and writing, but not because he sought to "make impact on the whole world", but because he sought to Live Jesus and love his God every day.



ABOUT LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES & INCONVENIENCE

In Introduction to the Devout Life Part 3 Chapter 3, Francis writes, *“Be patient not only with regard to the big, chief part of the afflictions that may come to you, but also as to things accompanying them and accidental circumstances. Many people would be ready to accept evils, provided they were not inconvenienced by them. ‘I wouldn’t be bothered by poverty,’ one man says, ‘if it didn’t keep me from helping my friends, educating my children, and living as respectably as I would like.’ ... Now I say that we must have patience not merely at being ill but at having the illness that God wishes, where he wishes, among the people he wishes, and with whatever difficulties he wishes.”*

Francis really believes in the power of accepting life circumstances as opportunities for grace, and ways to love God. He advocates for trying to remedy evil, for sure! He doesn’t say to just let evil happen and not try to fix it, heal, get better, etc. But having done all you can, be resigned to the fact that God sometimes allows suffering that we don’t like and don’t understand. And surrender. In my experience, sometimes the suffering isn’t as bad as the feeling of ‘this suffering is pointless and it’s inconveniently timed and it’s ruining my plans!’ He says take that as part and parcel of the suffering itself. Receive it from the careful hand of God, not as a random thing that came your way, but as something God is aware of fully.



ON THE DISPOSITION OF HEART DURING THE DAY

In Part 3 Chapter 10, Francis has this analogy that I simply love. I feel he ministers to and leads his spiritual directee women out of this mindset a lot.

“Imitate little children who with one hand hold fast to their father while with the other they gather strawberries or blackberries from the hedges. So too if you gather and handle the goods of the world with one hand, you must always hold fast with the other to your heavenly Father’s hand and turn toward him from time to time to see if your actions or occupations are pleasing to him. ... In ordinary affairs and occupations that do not require strict, earnest attention, you should look at God rather than at them.”

I love this imagery of going about my day with one hand in my Father’s hand. I’m doing my work, tending to my duties, neglecting nothing - but I am not alone. I feel the presence and protection and approval of my Father. I do not wander away from him. I give myself no possibility of falling into danger or sin when my hand is in his. I live in the world, but my heart is on my Lord, and my eyes are on my King. This is practicing the presence of God fully. I want this! I can imagine that Francis had mastered this, and was teaching this to Jane. How else could he be so gentle in his ministry, so forgiving to imperfection, and so transformative in his direction of people? He had his hand in his Father’s, and he wasn’t exhausting himself and burning himself out by all the work he had to do ‘for God’. Everything was done with God, and at God’s pace. This rubbed off on Jane, who was initially racing through her day in survival mode, and who was able to change her ways and amend her life.



ON THE “BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED” MISQUOTE

We've heard the beautiful quote, “*Bloom where you are planted.*” It evokes peaceful, surrendered imagery to God's plan. It's lovely! And you may know that it's attributed to Saint Francis de Sales. A longer quote is also attributed to him, which is allegedly where this simpler version comes from... “*Truly charity has no limit; for the love of God has been poured into our hearts by His Spirit dwelling in each one of us, calling us to a life of devotion and inviting us to bloom in the garden where He has planted and directing us to radiate the beauty and spread the fragrance of His Providence.*”

The problem?

Francis never said either of these.

Not exactly.

There's no *citation* to these claims. He absolutely spoke in metaphors and would have agreed with these quotes! He loved gardens, Song of Songs, the idea of our ordinary life being the place where we're called to find God, etc. But unfortunately, he did not exactly say them. Let me give you a few quotes in this same vein that he *did* say!

“...We do not deserve a high rank in God's service. We should be more than happy to serve him in his kitchen or pantry or to be his lackeys, porters, or chamberlains. ... The King of Glory does not reward his servants according to the dignity of the offices they hold, but according to the love and humility with which they fulfill their offices.” (Part 3 Chapter 2).

“If you wish to know which are the best kinds of [suffering], I tell you plainly that the ones most profitable to our souls and most acceptable to God are those which come to us accidentally or because of our state in life. The reason is that we have not chosen them ourselves, but have accepted them as sent by God and his choice is always better than our own.” (Part 3 Chapter 6)

“Let us try then to practice these virtues well, each according to his own vocation...All of us are obliged to practice these virtues, although not all in the same way.” (Part 3 Chapter 11) and similarly, “Devotion must be exercised in different ways by the gentleman, the worker, the servant, the prince, the widow, the young girl, and the married woman. ... The practice of devotion must be adapted to the strengths, activities, and duties of each particular person.” (Part 1 Chapter 3)

Finally, he talks about the concept of being inspired in our day to day to love God or do good - very individual and personal to each person - “When [inspirations] come, receive them as ambassadors sent by the King of Heaven who desires to enter into a marriage contract with you. Listen calmly to his proposal, think of the love with which you are inspired, and cherish that holy inspiration.” (Part 2 Chapter 9)



ON POVERTY IN MOTHERHOOD

Francis' poverty section particularly speaks to me as a mom. Jane, in *Janey* and in her real life did not live a life of material poverty. She, in fact, lived with plenty most of her life until she chose voluntary poverty with the Visitation Order. "Old Jane" was disturbed by this and worked hard to combat her material goods.

(Note: my choice to make Jane an influencer and to have that materialistic flavor was an interesting one. The real Jane de Chantal was nothing like an influencer and had no desire to show herself off. However, in the 21st century story, I felt that this was a great avenue to show her perfectionism, her effectiveness at motherhood, and her growing self-distrust and even self-loathing as she pursued a social media career she never would have wanted.)

Francis fully acknowledges that we cannot all live in poverty. He absolutely encourages us to take care of the needs of our home and business, and to work hard to be successful. But he speaks a lot about how to be unattached to material goods and how to embrace poverty in any season of life.

I really see this through the lens of motherhood in my poverty of my health, my schedule, my autonomy, my "self" in some sense. When I feel I cannot choose how to go about my day, when to leave my home, if I can carry out my plans or not, whether I have to cancel on my friends again, if I can execute my dinner plan or not... I am frustrated! I am poor! All is subject to the whims of my sweet children who I have opportunity *all the time* to teach patience and obedience. When I cannot make it through the day of pregnancy without fatigue and illness, I feel poor. When I cannot indulge in an hour of quiet prayer to myself - or quiet anything to myself - I feel poor. When I cannot claim even 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep, I feel poor. When I cannot find time to pursue my hopes, dreams, hobbies, friendships, or even health goals - I feel poor. I even feel poor in my deprivation of my senses: I cannot eat, listen to or smell what I want. I am overtouched, overstimulated with noise and mess. (Dramatic take, of course, but there is a lot of truth here)!

Francis writes a lot of practical advice in Part 3 Chapters 15-16. But in the lens of talking about motherhood (imposed here by me and only me, I admit!), here are my favorite quotes:

"Put the precious jewel of poverty at its high value. Its brilliance is not seen by the world, but it is surpassingly rich and beautiful. Be patient. You are in good company. Our Lord himself, Our Lady, the apostles, and countless saints have been poor. ... See how holy poverty is even more gracious to you and presents herself to you at your own door. ... Embrace her, then, as a dear friend of Jesus Christ, for he was born, lived, and died in poverty. Poverty was his nurse throughout his entire life. ... Recall often the journey our Lady undertook into Egypt in order to bring her beloved son there and remember all the contempt, poverty, and misery she had to endure. If you live in this way, you will be very rich in your poverty."

Poverty is the fruit of the third joyful mystery of the rosary: the Nativity. The birth of Jesus in the stable, in the manger, in poverty. Surely, my poverty and yours in motherhood can console the heart of God and can unite us to Jesus.