

## **Books That Have Formed My Spirituality, 1 of 3**

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The Lord bless you, dear family. The Lord has been on me to share with you some of the books that I use for formation. And it's very important to have a holy book, once in a while, especially when you're dry in prayer. A holy book to look at and open at random and allow the Holy Spirit to show you some things that you need to hear at that moment. Because when you're dry, it's very difficult to pray. When you just don't feel like you can connect with the Lord.

So. The first book I want to bring up, of course, is the Scriptures and this happens to be a Catholic Bible, New American Bible, I believe. But I like it because it has all the books in it and it's nice to have all the books. The stories of Ruth, and different people. Several stories; Tobit, a wonderful story about angels in Tobit's life.

So, I like that. I'm not saying the translation is perfect. I'd probably go back to something like the Douay Rheims if I wanted a perfect translation; but what translation is perfect or without error? That's got to be pretty impossible to find.

So, that's one reason why I like to use this Bible.

Okay. The next thing I'd like to share with you, if you're really interested in digging deep into Scripture, and you kind of have to get used to his style, is Word Studies by Weist. And of the Greek New Testament. And this is a really interesting, interesting book.

He does a great exegesis on everything in this book and it brings out a lot of depth, which is what I like. But I won't use it very often; it's almost like using the Amplified Bible which I also love. But I don't use it as much as I should.

Speaking of Bibles, I have the Passion translation here. And I love this, because it's like reading Scripture for the first time. His viewpoint and the way in which He expresses the language, it's just different. And has a personal quality to it that's very contemporary—and I like that. Once in a while, it's a real blessing to me.

As you know, I'm not a serious Bible scholar; far from it. As far from it as anyone could be, I think.

Well, one of the books that's really had an impact on my formation from the early, early, early days is The Imitation of Christ. And I really like this version; I think it's The Precious Blood Fathers, and it's My Imitation of Christ.

And this is scalpel level; this is a scalpel, okay? So, don't get this book if you're not serious, because it's going to pinpoint a lot of your faults. Here, I open up to grace and humility. And just to give you a taste of what it says, "My son it is more profitable and more safe for thee to hide the grace of devotion and not to exalt yourself. Not to speak much of it, not to consider it much, but rather to despise yourself the more and to be afraid of it as given to one unworthy."

You can see the language is a pretty rough, and pretty to the point.

"And you must not depend too much on the affection which may be quickly changed into the contrary. When you have had grace, think with yourself how miserable and poor you are wont to be when thou are without it. Nor does the progress of a spiritual life consist so much of having the grace of consolation."

This is so true.

"As in bearing the wont of it with humility."

You know those dark nights of the soul and those times we when just cannot connect. And when the Lord is taking that grace of feeling connected and being able to pray so that you really feel the Lord is listening. He takes those away, sometimes, to give them to other people. And it's a beautiful gift to Him.

So, you know people think, 'Oh! They're so spiritual. That person's so spiritual because they have all those visions. Well, no, that's not what it's about; it's about love and humility. And unless you love, none of those things matter. In fact, a lot of time these consolations are given to weaker souls to build them up and get them ready for the real deep plowing that the Lord is going to do when He removes those consolations, and they're just as in love with Him as they were before.

So, it's not so much about us hating ourselves. I think this is King James English; it's not so much about us hating ourselves as much as not wanting to vaunt ourselves and putting ourselves out there; not wanting to draw attention to ourselves.

And that's kind of hard when you're teaching, because you've got to speak to people. But there's a certain humility that the Lord works into our hearts so that we do feel unworthy when the Lord visits us with a consolation. And that's a beautiful thing; He loves to visit contrite hearts.

So, don't too contemporary with contemporary Christianity, You know, love yourself. And in a sense, you have to learn to love yourself and accept yourself the way Christ accepts you and loves you. That's very, very important. But then there's another side to that, and the other side is humility. And understanding who you are and who you are not before God. And this book is a pretty rough scalpel to get to your issues on that.

Okay, this book is more gentle. This was used by. Yeah, I can't quote that, I'm not sure. This is The Imitation of Mary. And for all you people who are so wondering what Mary's role really is? This man, I think, was a mystic and a seer; and it was Alexander De Rouville. And I'm trying to think when did he (you who speak French, I'm sorry if I offended you at that!) Let's see...when this was first printed? It doesn't say here, but it goes way, way, way back.

It's four books in one; Catholic Book Publishing Company, and this is a wonderful book for formation. And sometimes we need to look at where we are at with the Lord. I use this book every day; Carol uses this book. A lot of people are using this book because it helps you to get a perspective on holiness in the Lord's eyes.

And, for instance, I open to Obedience, and I'll read some of this: "Mary and Joseph, both, of the Davidic line, went to Bethlehem to be enrolled in accordance with the edict of the emperor, Augustus. The latter wanted to know the extent of his power and therefore ordered a census be taken throughout the empire.

"The holy pair did not reflect that in issuing his order the emperor was motivated by ambition and self-interest. No, they learned of the command and immediately obeyed. If Augustus had known Mary, perhaps he would have said, as Ahasuerus said to Esther, 'This decree is not meant for you.'

"But he did not know her under the edict just like everyone else. She obeyed like everyone else, and better than everyone else, because she obeyed humbly, patiently, and without murmuring." Even though she was close to 9 months pregnant at the time.

"She saw in the Emperor's order the will of God. The order was in her eyes an act of divine providence and she submitted without questioning."

Divine Providence is beautiful. There is a famous writer that I am going to introduce you to in a minute who wrote about Divine Providence and affected a lot of the life of Therese, the Little Flower.

And I wanted to mention to you too, that having a holy book with you during a time of prayer, especially in times of dryness, that dates all the way back to Teresa of Ávila. She did that. She recommended that for her nuns so they would never be without some understanding of what was going on in their lives at that time or in the Lord's heart.

So. "Obedience does not argue; simplicity is its hallmark. There is nothing more opposed to the spirit of submissiveness than the worldly prudence that wants to see and examine everything."

Boy this is for us right now!

"What would become of the subordination, if the orders of those who had the right to command were subjected to review by those whose duty it is to obey. If an earthly superior

gives you a command, he does not merit your obedience because of any quality in himself. It is the supreme authority whom he represents that merits your obedience.

"He who commands you can admittedly make mistakes, but as long as he commands nothing contrary to the divine law, the obedience you give him, and to God through him, cannot be in error and is always greatly meritorious before God."

That's a super important point, because a lot of the churches come down heavy-handed with obedience. And you need to know that obedience to man comes after obedience to God. So, if in your conscience you feel that God is telling you to do something, and your pastor tells you to do something else. And you have a real check in your conscience and your spirit, you are not bound to obey your pastor. Or your parents, even. If it goes against God's law or against your conscience for some reason, or in other words, you feel that's wrong.

There have been so many times in ministry when someone will unburden themselves to me and they'll share their problems, and I'll make suggestions—and they won't follow them. Most of the time they do. But sometimes, some of the things are very hard and they won't follow. And I used to be so self-righteous about that. I'd say, "Well, that one's disobedient. You deal with her, Lord." or "You deal with that one, Lord." That's terrible.

And that's the kind of climate that I was brought into, in the Evangelical climate. If you didn't agree or obey, then you were disobedient and in rebellion.

And, wow, the Lord sure turned my head around with that one.

The bottom line is that you owe obedience to God and none other, or authorities—unless it comes against the command of God.

Yes, smuggle Bibles into China, that's awesome! You don't have to follow the Chinese rules on that one. When it's a matter of morals, a matter of your own personal conviction. And so, what I've had to do basically, and I'm glad I have. I'm glad the Lord has given me this grace. Is that even when I feel almost positive that that person is wrong, I say to myself, "You know what? They might be right. Lord, I give it to you. They might be right, and if I need to be corrected, and You need to show me that they are right and I am wrong, then I receive that."

But I walk very, very tenderly over the conscience of other souls. In fact, I won't walk over their conscience at all. But when they bring something up to me like that, that they are convicted with. I let it go. Because I could very well be the one who's mistaken.

Maybe I should be counseling them sometimes to be more patient with their situation than to leave it. Only the Lord knows... Lord give us grace.

So, anyway, this goes on: "He that commands you can admittedly make mistake, but as long as he commands nothing contrary to divine law, the obedience you give to him and to God through him cannot be in error and is always greatly meritorious.

"The saints teach us that it is more profitable to do small things under obedience than to do great things of one's own will."

Boy, that leads down a bad road.

"Our modern-day wisdom scorns the simplicity of obedient hearts, because it understands nothing of the things of God. But what does the judgment of men matter to a person who takes the Gospel as the criterion of his judgments? Obedience is not meritorious if it is given because of the good qualities of the person who commands. In that case, the obedience is purely natural, and you can expect no reward except from men.

"Frequently, even in obedience rendered to God, men act so defectively and imperfectly, that the obedience loses much of its value and merit. If you do not obey promptly and joyously, except when the command accords with your own inclinations, you do your own will rather than the will of others.

"The truly obedient man does not delay in carrying out commands. Nor does he grumble against the authority of his superiors. Sacred Scripture teaches us to submit respectfully to our superiors; not only to the good ones who act with moderation, but also to those of a difficult temperament.

"You would find obedience difficult if you fastened your attention not on the man you are obeying, but on God (it looks like they printed this backwards) but on God, for whose sake you ought to obey. Victory is assured to the man who obeys, we are told by the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 21:28. Self-will is a source of corruption."

Amen to that!

"Obedience, when satisfied by a right intention, will enable us to avoid many evils and will win us God's approval."

So, that's the kind of counsel you get from this little book.

Let's see here. Usually it goes, the part goes, the soul talks about something and then Mary answers them. Like for instance it will say "Mary" at the very top, and that's kind of the Seer's interpretation. And I believe this person was actually receiving wisdom from Our Lady, because it's so right on.

But she says, "My child, the Lord sees the greatest merit in a person who in his humility believes he has no merits, great though his merits may in fact be. Upon what does God most gladly fix His gaze, whether in Heaven or on earth? The humble soul.

"He himself says, 'To whom shall the Lord turn His gaze, if not to the poor man, the man of humble heart, Psalm 11 in the Vulgate. Pride impoverishes many Christians and deprives them of the blessings of grace. If they made an effort to know themselves, the knowledge would make them humble and humility would bring healing for their needs through the graces it would obtain.

"Empty yourself of yourself, my child, and God will fill you with His gifts. Enrich yourself by admitting that of yourself you can only be wretched. If you are humble, God will use you to glorify Himself. He entrusts concern for His glory to those who have no desire to usurp it or to claim a share of it for themselves.

"When you receive a favor from God, be humble and thankful that He is good enough to bestow continual favors on the heart, to the least of His servants."

So, she goes on a little bit more here. It's a great book, really good. And I use it every day. And sometimes the Lord tells me to go look at that book, to open it.

Okay, this is Gabrielle Bossis, He and I; she had a very intimate relationship with the Lord and there is some beautiful dialogue in here, beautiful. Beautiful. Carol uses that book quite a bit.

And to go along with that would be Divine Mercy in My Soul, by Faustina Kowalska. This is a beautiful book, and as you can see, it's pretty beat up. This is my original copy. I've used this for years, probably 35, to be exact. This is a wonderful book.

Faustina is just the sweetest thing; she is just a beautiful soul. She and the Lord were constantly talking back and forth, and her superiors told her, "I want you to write down everything you hear from God." And she's responsible for the devotion to the Divine Mercy, the image of Jesus with the rays, the pale ray and the red ray coming from His heart.

And she died the night the first shot was fired in World War II. She was holding it back with her prayers, and the Lord took her before a shot could be fired. That's the kind of impact she had on Him with her prayers. Amazing; absolutely amazing.

Okay, speaking of Saints. This is The Life of Padre Pio. Just about everything he writes is really, really good. This is wonderful. I picked this up this morning, because the Lord drew my attention to it. And Padre Pio had multiple illnesses which they could never understand what was causing these things. And it's interesting, because Ezekiel, when he goes to the doctor, all the symptoms that they're looking for to verify that there's a problem there, were gone. The blood work was clear, the stool samples were clear; everything was clear.

And when he was in severe pain in the doctor's office, his blood pressure didn't shoot up like it normally would for most people. So, the doctors thought he was putting on an act. As a result, he didn't get any pain medication, and the neighbors came over to find out why he was screaming so loud. And there were times it was just terrible; it was really hard.

So, that's typical of the workings of the Lord. It's so typical. Because this soul... he was a Franciscan monk and priest and he gave himself totally to the Lord. He loved the Lord deeply, and from a young age. And this is the kind of content that it has.

"The prognosis and prediction of the doctors came to nothing." Because he would have sudden fevers and sudden pains and they'd wonder what it was, so they'd take him to the doctors. But nothing checked out.

"What had appeared to the medical staff as pathological was simply the effect of God's action preparing his chosen servant for the reception of extraordinary gifts. Back at San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio resumed his reading of spiritual books, the study and meditation on sacred Scripture, the spiritual direction of numerous souls by mail and the formation of young aspirants for the priesthood."

When I read this, this morning, it gave me great encouragement to continue to respond to people who write to me asking me for advice. Because that's what he did.

And Jesus had told Padre Pio in 1913, "Fear not; I shall make you suffer, but I shall also give you strength. I want your soul to be purified and tested by daily and hidden martyrdoms." And now the state of purification was to reach an apex. In addition to the physical suffering, the Capuchin friar is to experience atrocious moral suffering intensified by his own personal sensitivity."

Now a lot of you are going to be able to relate to this, absolutely. This is about the dark night of the soul. We get some indication about all of this by quoting a few statements from his letters.

"I am always suspended on the hard wood of the cross without consolation, without respite. How can I describe the agonizing pain which is causing my soul a martyrdom? My God, my God, do not make me suffer any longer. I can stand it no more. I am suffering so intensely in my soul that I can say with the psalmist that I have reached the watery depths; the flood overwhelms me.

"I am wearied with calling; my throat is parched, my eyes have failed with looking for my God."

Padre Pio was tormented with thoughts and suggestions, with feelings of despair, with doubts as to whether he had corresponded with God's love and with fear that he may have offended God, even in light matters.

He no longer knew which path to follow in order to be united with God. He was afraid of falling into the abyss, or of stumbling at every step. He doubted whether his sufferings were either willed by God or even permitted by Him. He was afraid that he had not sufficiently resisted the attacks of the devil or walked carefully enough to avoid his snares.

As a result, his mind was filled with doubts and anxieties that kept him in constant anguish. He was experiencing the mystical purgation of the dark night of the soul. God was infusing his soul with a light so intense that it is purging it completely before raising it to the height of mystical contemplation.

But instead of illuminating his spirit, the bright light causes darkness and torment, so that he cries out in one of his letters, 'My God, have I lost the way? Have I lost you? But will I find you again? Have you condemned me to all of eternity far from your face?'

So, you can get an idea; these are things we all suffer in the spiritual life. We all have these questions. And understanding that you're not the only one and that these things are a part of being purified spiritually, really does help us to get through them.

So, that's a good book and he's a wonderful author. He has another book here. Let's see if... Oh, I good. I want to show you this book. Let's see if I have it down here... Well, what the book is, is *Spiritual Direction for Every Day*; it's got a title kind of like that.

Okay. I mentioned before Theresa Little Flower, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean-Pierre de Caussade. This is a wonderful, wonderful book. Very deep. And it teaches you to totally let go. There's a shorter version of this that's written by him, too, but this book is wonderful.

To give you an idea of what it says, you can see I've marked this one up pretty good.

"Do you want to think right and live like prophets, apostles and saints? Then you must surrender, as they did, to the inspirations of God. On an unknown level it would seem that all your wonders are over and done with, and there's nothing left to do but copy your old works, repeat your old utterances of the past. We do not see that your activity can ever be exhausted, and that it is an endless source of fresh thought, new sufferings, new deeds; a source of new patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and saints. Who have no need to copy anything written and done before their time. But simply spend their lives in continual abandonment of themselves to your hidden guidance."

I'm trying to find something else that really represents this.

"We must stop ourselves naked, renounce all desire for created things; retain nothing of ourselves or for ourselves so that we can be wholly submissive to God's will and to so delight Him. Only our satisfaction must be to live in the present moment, as if there were nothing to



expect beyond it. If what happens to a soul abandoned to God is all that is necessary for it, it is clear that it can lack nothing and that it should never complain.”

So, basically what he’s saying in this book over and over again in different ways, is let go. And let God. Abandon yourself to Him; trust Him. This was part of the teachings that came to Theresa, the Little Flower. And she was great on abandonment to Divine Providence.

Especially abandoning your own perfection and not thinking about it, “What will make me more perfect?” It’s not for you to make yourself perfect, it’s for the Lord. And it’s simple obedience every day that brings you to perfection and letting go and trusting God in all things. Easier said than done!

So, this is a wonderful, solid, solid book spiritually.