

The Role of Spiritual Disciplines in the Life of Madame Guyon

Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon (April 13, 1648 - June 9, 1717 - referred to by her married name throughout) is a great exemplar from the past of spirituality, her life a testimony of one whose heart and soul were utterly consumed with passion for Jesus Christ.¹ The spiritual disciplines served to form her entire life into one of Christlikeness, which, in turn, greatly affected those around her, shook up and confronted the Roman Catholic Church of her time, and still influences and challenges us today.² Lawson, in fact, gives her the lofty title of one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time.³ Madame Guyon exemplifies one who used spiritual disciplines as they should be used, namely, to liberate her from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear⁴ into the freedom of serving her Lord, becoming increasingly like him as she learned routine and easy obedience until she was finally united with him.

¹ Eric Rose, *The Life and Teaching of Jeanne Guyon*, accessed April 2007; available from <http://rccop.org/err/teaching/guyon/text.html>; Internet.

² Madame Guyon greatly affected Watchman Nee's work in China. David Tan writes, "She has contributed greatly by teaching the Chinese Church about the secret work of the Holy Spirit. Her life and teachings are still blessing the Chinese Church today as they did in the past centuries...In the testimony of the Chinese Church, we can still find emphasis on the cross, love, prayer, worship, naked faith, simplicity, and purity that are the key themes in Madame Guyon's teachings." David Tan, *The Secret Work of the Holy Spirit in China Through Madame Guyon*, *JAM* 4:1 (2002), 97-110; accessed March 2007; available from <http://www.pts.edu/jam/02-1/D-Tan.pdf> - Internet.

Madame Guyon also played an influential role in the spread of Quietism. Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon*, accessed March 2007; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeanne_Marie_Bouvier_de_la_Motte_Guyon. Internet. Guyon influenced Quakerism in general and some of her writings were used by the Society of Friends, Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *A Guide to True Peace, - Friends' Theological Heritage: From Seventeenth-Century Quietists to Quaker Theology #6 -Spring 2002*, accessed April 2007; available from <http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue6-3-Lelle01.htm>. Internet. Dianne Guenin-Lelle writes that her followers came primarily from outside of France and included John Wesley. She was seen to have influence among Pietists, Quakers, Methodists and other such movements of the time.

She is still considered to have influence in evangelical, charismatic, and ecumenical circles. David Cloud, *Madame Guyon: Catholic, Mystic, Apostate*, First Published March 21, 2001 & Updated June 9, 2004; accessed April 2007; available from <http://logosresourcepages.org/Believers/guyon.htm>. Internet

³ James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Anderson, IN Warner Press, 1978), 69.

⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 2.

To aid in the discussion of the role that spiritual disciplines played in Madame Guyon's life, Richard Foster's description of spiritual disciplines will be followed, namely, the Inward Disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; the Outward Disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and the Corporate Disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.⁵ What becomes obvious is that the fruits of the various disciplines are often similar and overlap as Guyon progresses in her spiritual life; thus, there will be some repetition as the role of each discipline in her life is examined. Because the material in the autobiography is still pertinent for today and because Guyon's writings themselves oscillate between first and third person, both first and third person will be used in this discussion as well.

Inward Disciplines – Meditation

Foster points out that meditation boldly calls us into the living presence of our God,⁶ and as a result of our encounter with him, our behavior is changed through repentance and obedience.⁷ In our use of meditation, we are urged to “live in an uninterrupted fellowship” with our Maker and to grow into a “familiar friendship with Jesus.”⁸ Further, by proper use of meditation, we receive insight into various matters and increasingly gain greater perspective and balance in our lives,⁹ resulting in the total transformation of us as people.¹⁰ The use of meditation definitely led to these changes in Madame Guyon's life.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Foster, Ibid., 24.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 62.

Guyon writes that when following the instruction of her sister in praising God in all his works, her heart was “nourished insensibly” with God’s love; she seemed to join and partake in all the good that was done in the world.¹¹ Her later poems reflect an even deeper meditation on creation, stating, “All scenes alike engaging prove to souls impressed with sacred love!”¹² Madam Guyon’s life story is one continual example of a life completely transformed by obedience and repentance. She is an individual who did, indeed, learn to live in uninterrupted fellowship with her Lord with such intensity that she would face any persecution or “crosses” rather than be deprived of the most ultimate of intimate bonds. As she grew in her relationship with the Lord, her perspective on life and her insights into other lives model Foster’s description of meditation, as will be evident in the section below on “Guidance.”

Foster writes that through meditation we can descend with our mind into our heart more easily if we use our imagination.¹³ Using imagination became an integral part of this discipline for Guyon. When she first began to use this discipline, she was unable to use her imagination, limiting not only her meditation but also her ability to use mental prayer (discussed later); however, by remaining persistent, her use of imagination significantly benefited her own and her disciples’ meditation and prayer life.

To aid in practicing and teaching this discipline, Guyon used her increasingly popular writings. In her well-known work, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, she

¹¹ Plantinga, Harry, *Autobiography of Madame Guyon*, Chapter 5 [book on-line] (Moody Press, 1995, accessed February – May 2007); available from <http://biblestudy.churches.net/CCEL/G/GUYON/AUTO/AUTOBIO1.HTM>. Internet.

¹² Jeanne Guyon, *The Soul That Loves God Finds Him Everywhere; Scenes Favorable to Meditations*, translated by William Cowper, accessed April 2007; available from <http://www.meatindueseason.org/miscellaneous/guyon/guyon-poetry.html>. Internet.

¹³ Foster, *Ibid.*, 25.

incorporates both meditation and reading. Meditation, she writes, is to be practiced in an appropriate season, not necessarily at the time of reading (which has its own place). The method she suggests is to quiet oneself before God and become “warmly penetrated with a lively sense of the Divine presence,” enjoying its full relish;¹⁴ in time, staying in God’s presence transforms our hearts and our minds, a benefit of meditation as Foster suggests.

Madame Guyon lived boldly and humbly in the presence of God. Meditation and the other disciplines confidently led her to such an intimate union and friendship with her Maker that others desired the same experience and relationship with him; thus God was able to use her mightily in the lives of many people from diverse walks of life.

Ironically, others despised her for this intimacy and persecuted her for not remaining within the confines of the Catholic faith and its practices. However, these persecutions and hardships only continued to mold and change her, strengthening her faith, and solidifying her union with the holy, living God. Both the spiritual discipline of meditation and the persecution she endured because of her faith brought her into an intimate presence of the living God.

Prayer

Madame Guyon’s prayer life models that “prayer takes no time but occupies all our time.”¹⁵ She writes that prayer is the “effusion of the heart in the presence of God;”¹⁶ one who has a pure heart will always pray and one who always prays will know what it is

¹⁴ Jeanne Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter. II. 3. 4. [book on-line] ed. James W. Metcalf (Printed in 1853) accessed, April 2007; available from <http://www.passtheword.org/DIALOGS-FROM-THE-PAST/methodofprayer.htm>. Internet.

¹⁵ Foster, *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter XX.1.

to have a pure heart.¹⁷ This view of prayer matches Foster's description. He writes that prayer catapults us into the frontier of spiritual life as it did for Guyon. Prayer, states Foster, is the most central discipline because it ushers us into unending communion with our heavenly Father and brings us into the deepest and highest work of our spirit. Moreover, prayer lies at the root of all personal godliness and is the main avenue God uses to transform us. It changes the total atmosphere of our lives; as we enter into the power of God, we gain confidence in knowing how to operate with him, working together in his kingdom. As we draw nearer to God, more of our heart is exposed allowing us to be set free from our snares; this, in turn, transforms us to desire what God desires, to love the things that he loves, and to want what he wants.¹⁸ Foster also states that a critical aspect of learning to pray is contacting God so his life and power can increasingly flow through us into others.¹⁹ Such prayer is not an isolated event but completely fills our time and lives.

Once again, this seventeenth century woman of God exemplifies this discipline. Initially, Madame Guyon only prayed as taught by the Roman Catholic Church of the day. Quickly those methods were inadequate for her, in part, because her family tried to prevent her from continual prayer, so forcing her to find another method. Still early in her walk, Guyon witnessed a houseguest at prayer, noting in this woman the beautiful, peaceful countenance of one who enjoyed being with God. In her desire to obtain this same serenity, Guyon tried to study, reflect, and practice this same method of prayer. Desiring intimate communication with God, she sought it the only way she knew how,

¹⁷ Jeanne Guyon, *Gems #44*, accessed April 2007; available from <http://articles.christiansunite.com/article2929.shtml>. Internet.

¹⁸ Foster, *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

namely, through the disciplines and her own works. Only after a religious person from the Order of St. Francis told her to seek within her, to seek God in her heart and find him there, did this method of prayer become an integral part of her life. In time she learned (and eventually taught) Mental Prayer, a form of prayer that took no time and yet occupied all her time; it was this form of inner prayer that made it possible for her to accept with patience the hardships and tremendous persecutions she had to endure. Thereafter, prayer, which now involved her total will, imagination, and understanding became easy for her and she passed hours in prayer with great passion and zeal. She states, “It was a prayer of rejoicing and possessing, devoid of all busy imaginations and forced reflections; it was a prayer of the will, and not of the head.”²⁰ Her heart now had a language of its own that God understood and which spoke continually to her soul. Although the pressures from her family remained, her spirit of prayer was actually nourished and increased exactly by what was done to suppress it. In fact, as her state of prayer increased, her faith increased as did her desire to suffer as Jesus did.

Prayer was such a necessity to Madame Guyon that she would look for times of prayer about which her family would not know. She would rise very early in the morning to sneak out of the house, trusting God to arrange “continual providences” such as weather, chapel services, and the energies she needed to continue.²¹ Other times she would go to the woods or caverns or find other solitary places to commune with her Lord. Before she was arrested, she spent about five or six months alone, reading, praying, and working; while in prison, she spent her time in great peace, glad to have the time to spend

²⁰ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 17.

concentrating on her relationship with her Spouse through prayer. Prayer never left her life again.

As Jeanne Guyon's prayer life and personal holiness grew, God increasingly became her refuge; she felt his love gradually take over her heart, slowly replacing other loves including self-love and self-complacency. She found that God's Word made such an impression on her heart that she entered into an inward spirit of prayer, often being overtaken by a profound silence and an inexpressible peace. As the crosses increased, Guyon's desire for prayer was unquenchable; in time, prayer permeated all her time and her life. She states that her disposition was one of such continual prayer that the presence of God was more abundant in her than she was in her own self.²² She discovered that not even sleep kept her from praying, bringing her into a state of ultimate happiness.

Guyon did, however, pass through many dry periods where she felt alienated from God. During those times, it seemed as though the Lord and his nearness would never return; although this troubled her deeply, it did not stop her from praying. Her strong love for the will of God led her to disregard any kind of obstacles and to continue pursuing him regardless of her feelings. She writes that even in the state of emptiness, darkness, and impotency when prayers seem most dry and barren, they are still effectual and are not offered in vain.²³

Prayer catapults us into the frontier of spiritual life, states Foster. He points out that the Bible pray-ers prayed as if their prayers could and would make an objective difference in their lives.²⁴ So did Madame Guyon; truly, her prayers changed many

²² Ibid., Book I, Chapter 18.

²³ Ibid., Book I, Chapter 21.

²⁴ Foster, Ibid., 35.

people's lives - besides her own - as God's power increasingly flowed through her. By way of examples, because of her use of this discipline: she was given direction in how to speak to others including judges; she knew how to interpret and work with legal documents for up to twenty-two different claimants and their lawyers; she was given clarity when addressing church authorities' many objections to her writings; she wrote many letters and theological documents under the power of the Holy Spirit; she was given insight into people's physical ailments and how to relieve them; she was given the gift of healing; even evil spirits would flee from her.²⁵ Guyon prayed for the conversion of many and saw the fruits of such prayers on numerous occasions including the conversion of several families and individuals, ecclesiastics, three famous friars, three curates, one canon, and one grand-vicar.²⁶ Through her prayer life, she was given insight into many people's lives, enabling her to minister to them so they themselves were also "furnished with a wonderful facility of prayer."²⁷

Another effect of her fervent prayer life was exercised in her authority over aspects of creation; she was often preserved from dangerous and poisonous creatures; during many perilous travels, she remained so confident of God's perfect will for her life that she stayed peaceful while others in her group despaired for their lives; at another time she prayed for God to send a wind to relieve the violent heat; he did.²⁸ Madame Guyon knew the heart of her Father and prayed for his will in all things, knowing that her prayers would make a difference.

²⁵ Tan, *Ibid.*, 4.2.4.

²⁶ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 29, 6, Book II, Chapter 18, 14, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Book I, chapter 29.

Guyon believed that the difficulty of prayer lies in the fact that people tend to be preoccupied with themselves: their interests, their intentions, their schemes, and their worries rather than what is on God's heart and how to further his kingdom. Already as a child, Guyon loved to pray diligently, having had the discipline modeled for her by her sister. Early on, she learned that it was best not to complain to "weak and impotent creatures" but to tell God all her troubles and beg his grace instead. At different times, when she did turn to man for comfort and advice rather than to God in prayer, she subsequently experienced the consequences, often in severe ways. God would then allow her to sink into the horrible pit of man-reliance so she would know the necessity of talking to him; only when she resumed her life of prayer was she changed and brought up from the abyss; in fact, she soon saw that leaving off prayer was the first inlet of evil and a strategy of Satan to entangle her in the snares he laid for her.²⁹

Madame Guyon writes that Satan finds prayer and those who practice this discipline contemptible because he knows that prayer is the only true way of snatching his prey from him. Therefore, people must expect strange crosses, persecutions, and the contempt of the world when they enter this discipline. Prayer, she states, is a stronghold into which Satan cannot enter and that makes him very angry. He can only attack prayer, besiege it, and make a lot of noise, but while we remain faithful in prayer, he cannot hurt us.³⁰ True to form, the devil frequently stirred up persecution against Guyon hoping to discourage her greatly so she would cease from prayer; yet again, it was those same

²⁹ Ibid., Book I, Chapter 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

hardships that God used to guide her into the wilderness and nourish her, allowing the devil no foothold.

Foster's emphasized that prayer is the most central of all spiritual disciplines; Guyon too believed that everyone must learn how to pray. As prayer was modeled for her, so she modeled prayer for many others including her little daughter, a fervent prayer warrior. In addition, Guyon led a sister into the method of inward prayer, which in time saved this young lady from an inappropriate relationship with an ecclesiastic. Madame Guyon taught on prayer inviting people to seek nothing but the love of God. Prayer, she stated, is nothing but the application of the heart to God and the internal exercise of love. Prayer is the key to perfection and the only way in which we can be brought into God's presence and stay there without interruption. She states that nothing is so easily obtained as the possession and enjoyment of God, who is extremely desirous of giving himself to us.³¹ To that end she developed *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer* involving readings and meditation that anyone can practice. Through this method, she encouraged her disciples to pray the Scriptures. The first step involves reading a small portion of Scripture, taking it in fully, gently, and carefully so the reader can taste it and digest it, sensing the heart of the passage. The second step is to behold or wait on the Lord, quieting the mind before him, and then turning the heart to him.³² This method, which many of her disciples used, is still being used by Christians today as they seek to transform lives through prayer and meditation.

³¹ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter 1.1; 1.3; 1.5.

³² *Ibid.*, Chapter II, IV.

Madame Guyon's prayer was with an openness and a singular focus. Her use of this central discipline led her into perpetual communion with her heavenly Father and brought her into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Her prayer life lay at the root of her godliness and served as the central avenue used by God to transform her and, in turn, used her to help transform others.

Fasting

More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us, a revelation that is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus, states Foster.³³ While Madame Guyon seldom mentions her own fasting specifically, her ardent desire was to purge from herself anything that was not conformed to the life of Jesus; only by a total death to herself could she be lost in God. When she was young, she fasted in order to mortify all the things of her flesh. She states that initially she was too full of self-love to submit to such mortifications, but as she was increasingly filled with God's love, she felt compelled to deprive herself of even minute indulgences. At times, fasting was forced by other conditions, such as frequent illness, neglect, or rancid food, but primarily she fasted because of her deep desire to be free from any fleshly indulgence. So zealously did she strive to not gratify her flesh or her tastes that in time she was indifferent to taste, not always sure of what she ate. She states that her senses were "continually mortified and under perpetual restraint," finding it necessary to deny them even the smallest relaxation to destroy their power.³⁴ Madame

³³ Foster, *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁴ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 11.

Guyon sought to purge any hindrance from her walk with God and successfully used fasting as a method to free herself from things of the flesh.

Study

The Celebration of Discipline states that the final inward discipline of study is one of the central ways God uses to change us.³⁵ As we study God's truth and the lives of other Christians, our ingrained thought habits are formed to new life-giving habits.³⁶

Jeanne Guyon was educated by a variety of people, beginning with a godly education from her sister. At the age of ten, Jeanne found a Bible, and having "both a fondness for reading and a happy memory," spent days in reading Scripture, learning the historical parts.³⁷ She seemed drawn to religious exercises such as reading, praying, and teaching the catechism to the poor. She read the works of St. Francis de Sales and the life of Madam Chantal in an attempt to grow in her spiritual life. After she was married, Guyon continued reading, now confining herself to devotional books, adding the works of Thomas à Kempis and the Scriptures. Her study of the Word of God comforted her greatly, especially when she realized what she experienced had been written in Scripture and that nothing happened in her soul that was not in Jesus and his Word.

Madame Guyon had an extremely high regard for Scripture. She believed it essential that people learn to listen to Christ to receive life. Not only is the Word essential and eternal, but when Jesus is revealed to our soul through the Word, it changes us into new creatures. Although she writes little in her autobiography about her own study habits, through her work, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, she encouraged her

³⁵ Foster. *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 64,65.

³⁷ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 3.

disciples to read Scripture, spending time meditating on various passages. Although this method would not lead to reading large portions of God's Word, Guyon believed this particular process of reading and digesting smaller portions would form people in becoming more Christlike.³⁸

Madame Guyon was inspired to write many other great works (totaling forty-one texts³⁹) including an entire treatise on the interior path of faith, a work that assisted many people's faith walk. This popular work rapidly went through several editions. During a time when she was especially moved to read Scripture, she began to write out passages and was instantly given the explanation, using both Old and New Testament passages. She said the Lord made her write with such purity that she was obliged to start and stop as he pleased. At one point, what she wrote in one night required five days for her transcriber to copy. Guyon was so led by the Spirit that when a portion of the book of Judges was lost, requiring a rewrite, she wrote it again. When the initial work was found, she discovered that the rewritten portion was precisely the same as the first writing was⁴⁰ - something only the Spirit could do. The study books she wrote under the Spirit's guidance assisted many others in their spiritual walk.

Another benefit of this discipline was that study assisted Madame Guyon when her writings were attacked. For example, on one occasion two friars had studied a number of difficult matters and came to test her on matters they assumed were out of her reach. Either because of her study, her prayer life, fasting, or a combination, she answered them as God inspired her, satisfying the friars, and encouraging them in their own walk with

³⁸ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter. II.1.

³⁹ Sarah Jane Smith, "Balaam's she-ass Speaks: Madame Jeanne Guyon and her *Justifications*." (PH.D diss., Emory University, 2001), Abstract 1.

⁴⁰ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 16.

the Lord. This same kind of confrontation happened on another occasion when her book was challenged; again, with the Lord assisting her, the answers satisfied Monsieur Malaval and prevented her being expelled from the city. Later Guyon was challenged yet again by the Rector of the Jesuits; he too went away both surprised at and satisfied with her answers. At another time, her daughter's friend, Abbe Fenelon, also objected to some of her teachings; this time Guyon expounded so clearly that he became one of her fellow disciples. Yet on another occasion, she challenged Bishop Meaux to read her writings. After taking four or five months to read these works, he raised various objections, all of which she satisfactorily answered.⁴¹

Madame Guyon's study assisted greatly in her transformation. She so loved to study the Word of God that she sought to live it in the minutest detail of her life. Her use of this discipline has blessed the lives of many others even into this twenty-first century.

Outward Disciplines – Simplicity

The discipline of simplicity begins with an inward reality resulting in an outward lifestyle change. Simplicity is the only thing that sufficiently reorients our lives so we can enjoy possessions without their destroying us. As any inner spirit of slavery that leads to an idolatrous attachment to wealth is destroyed, we become content in both abasement and plenty.⁴² Foster points out that the discipline of simplicity is to seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness first and then everything necessary will come in its proper order.⁴³ Similarly, Guyon states that God's Kingdom rule will be our rule when we

⁴¹ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 21.

⁴² Foster, *Ibid.*, 80, 82, 84.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 86.

possess God who is the Supreme Good;⁴⁴ thus the one who has learned to seek nothing but the will of God will always find what he seeks.⁴⁵

In this discipline, Madame Guyon is an example to be imitated once again. She sought and craved simplicity so that nothing would inhibit her devotion to her Love, having seen the emptiness of worldly kingdoms and tasted the goodness of the Lord. To that end she demanded simplicity from herself. For example, she dressed simply. She tried to inconvenience no one but suffered rather than cause anyone extra work or grief. She no longer attended any plays or dances and ceased going on unprofitable walks. When the queen wanted to see her, Madame Guyon declined this prestigious opportunity. She regularly gave both food and belongings to the poor, keeping only what she needed for herself. After her husband passed away, she made vows of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience and celebrated “happy poverty, happy loss, happy nothingness,” being only too glad that nothing could keep her from God’s divine essence.⁴⁶ She declared that it was a pleasure to lose all for the Lord because the love of poverty was the kingdom of tranquility, and she had no thought of loving anything but the poverty of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ Further, Madame Guyon consistently made sure others, including her children or maids were in better conditions than she, being quite content with what she had even when conditions were far less than ideal.

A particular instance highlights this discipline of simplicity. Her maid, at one point, became sick, causing the maid’s family to worry that Madame Guyon might obtain the girl’s material possessions. Obviously this family did not know what quality of

⁴⁴ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter XX.5.

⁴⁵ Guyon, *Gems* #53.

⁴⁶ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 7.

⁴⁷ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 1.

woman with whom they were dealing. Guyon states, “far from desiring the property of others, I had given up my own.”⁴⁸ This became even truer when her family asked her to sign over her possessions to them; she was quite happy to sign it all over being quite free and willing to be poor so she could imitate the Lord Jesus Christ.

Madame Guyon used the discipline of simplicity to change her way of thinking and her habits. By continually depriving herself, Guyon’s inward reality resulted in a clear, outward statement: she died attached only to her Lord.

Solitude

Jesus calls us to an inward solitude wherein we do not fear being alone because we are not, and wherein we no longer fear others because they do not control us.

Solitude, says Foster, is a portable sanctuary of the heart;⁴⁹ within this sanctuary, silence plays a role, putting a stopper on self-justification, allowing God to be our justifier.

Foster goes on to say that if we are to take this discipline seriously, we must enter the dark night of the soul, wherein God lovingly draws us away from every distraction so we see him more clearly.⁵⁰ Through the discipline of solitude, God can form us to his image.

Madame Guyon did not get all the solitude she craved which may have forced her to make a portable sanctuary of her heart. Soon after she learned to seek Jesus in her heart and began to live more simply, she found it necessary to steal moments to be alone with God. When her mother-in-law and husband began to watch her closely so she could not retreat into prayer, Madame Guyon would physically stay in their presence and do her required work but in her heart retreated to be with her Lord. She often felt as though her

⁴⁸ Ibid., Book II, Chapter 18.

⁴⁹ Foster, Ibid., 96, 97.

⁵⁰ Foster, Ibid., 103.

heart was torn between her Lord and her family and husband, finding that she did not give herself wholly to the one or the other. Her desire was to retreat to a convent in order to concentrate on becoming what the Lord wanted her to become, but she knew that for the time, she needed to stay where she was though the conditions were often exceedingly harsh. Guyon believed that the many hardships and crosses she endured would have been easier if she had the liberty to be alone and pray, but those times were rare. Ironically, the events that occasioned solitude were frequently brought by times of illness. For Guyon, those times became very precious to her serving her as the “sweet retreat”⁵¹ she longed for in spite of often very severe sickness and pain.

At times, Madame Guyon specifically arranged times of solitude although some of those moments had to be undetected. She would creep away into the woods, caves, or caverns seeking the seclusion desired. After her husband passed away, she was finally free enough to go into the country with her young children and enjoy uninterrupted tranquility. Guyon also went on various targeted retreats in pursuit of solitude. For example, her first vows of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience were made on such a twelve-day retreat in Tanon. Later, when she was actively serving as a spiritual mother to many people, she begged Father La Combe to allow her a retreat. When he consented to this time of solitude, she left and there she let herself be consumed by love all day long.⁵² At another time in Gex, Madame Guyon was given a poor, solitary place in which she enjoyed a sweet and solid satisfaction in spite of abuse. She states that she considered herself happier there than any sovereign on earth could be because the place

⁵¹ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapters, 19, 20.

⁵² Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 11.

for her was like a nest and a place of repose. Although the persecutions against her were very great, she was not the least bit uneasy, being perfectly at peace to receive anything from the hand of God.

These times of solitude strengthened Guyon and her ministry. After placing her young daughter in a convent, Guyon again left to be alone, resigning herself to be “possessed in solitude by Him who is the absolute Sovereign of my soul.”⁵³ Although she was there unannounced, God sent her several people to whom she could minister; there, being unhindered by others’ demands and controls, she sought the Lord’s will for each person the Lord sent, giving the individuals precisely what was needed.

Near the end of her life, Guyon was given longer periods of time to exercise this discipline of solitude, some by her own initiative, others forced on her. For about five or six months, she took a private little place for herself and her maids, passing the days alone reading, praying, and working. Later, ten years of solitude were forced on her - she was arrested and placed in various prisons and banishments. Even though this led to struggles with feelings that God had forsaken her, she put herself on the side of God against herself rather than give in to those feelings. The time in prison, in fact, became a time of great peace, leaving her content to pass the rest of her life there if it was the will of God. She sang songs of joy and praise, considering the stones of the prison her rubies because she was able to be solely with her Spouse.⁵⁴

Foster mentions that through solitude we learn to not fear being alone or to fear others since they do not control us. Indeed, through all the times of voluntary and

⁵³ Ibid., Book II, Chapter 14.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Book II, Chapter 21.

involuntary solitude, Madame Guyon learned to live fearlessly. She was utterly content to rest in whatever came her way, knowing that God was in charge; she feared no wild beasts, elements of nature, nor church authorities. She had no need to justify herself regardless of what was happening to her reputation or to her possessions. Love would not allow her to justify herself, seeing self-justification as infidelity⁵⁵ to God's plan. By remaining so inclined to the Lord, Guyon maintained a peaceful disposition throughout her life.

Madame Guyon definitely entered the dark night of the soul, a condition Foster states is part of this discipline. During this dark period, she was without joy, peace, or emotions of any kind, and the last barriers that kept her from God's presence were finally annihilated.⁵⁶ She writes that one who is destined to have no other support except God must pass through the strangest trials, suffering much agony and many deaths; one will feel a terrible hell of pain and temptations, the cross of crosses.⁵⁷ Guyon passed through those trials and the hell of those feelings. She experienced very dry times wherein she felt nothing but the pain of his absence, feeling as though God would never return to her again. Initially, she thought she had made God withdraw but later realized it was a state she had to pass through to die to herself and to be prepared to enter his love in a deep way. Her dark night of the soul lasted for almost seven years; it was a state of emptiness, darkness, and impotency that went far beyond any trials she had met. She was unable to pray, heaven seemed shut to her, and she could not move the desolation she felt. She continued to attend church but was ill at ease, not refreshed by the services. Convinced

⁵⁵ Ibid., Book I Chapters 16, 18.

⁵⁶ Rose., Ibid.

⁵⁷ Guyon, *Gems* #33.

God only gave her what was best for her, she recognized that by causing her death she would attain life and learn a complete dependence on the Lord and the Holy Spirit. In hindsight, Guyon realized those times of dryness were purifiers for the joy that would follow.⁵⁸ Her joy was beautifully realized on Magdalene's day when she was perfectly delivered from all her pains and was left with an inexpressible joy, finally receiving and possessing the God of peace. Because she passed through the dark night of the soul, her work continued with more power than it had previously.⁵⁹

Knowing her very survival with the Lord depended on it, Madame Guyon zealously sought inward solitude. As a result, she did not fear being alone nor did she fear others regardless of their rank in life and regardless of what they did to her or her reputation. No one but God controlled her anymore. Her life modeled a portable sanctuary of the heart, for she knew how to worship the Lord wherever she was, regardless of her state. She entered the dark night of the soul and was lovingly drawn from every distraction so she could see her Spouse more clearly. By the regular use of the discipline of solitude, her life and her ministry were greatly strengthened.

Submission

Early in her spiritual pilgrimage, Madame Guyon forced herself to learn the discipline of submission. Not only did this teach her to lay down the burden of always needing to get her own way, as Foster claims this discipline does, but it also taught her that happiness was not dependent on getting what she wanted, yet another goal of

⁵⁸ Madame Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the state of Union, Part I.* #16; accessed April 2006; available from <http://www.passtheword.org/DIALOGS-FROM-THE-PAST/waytogod.htm>. Internet.

⁵⁹ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 27.

submission.⁶⁰ In her autobiography, itself written in obedience, Madame Guyon makes repeated mention of submitting to her directors or confessors, but she also willingly submitted to others throughout her life. Through the use of this discipline, she learned a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit that sustained her walk.

Her married life, beginning at fifteen years old, was such an immense trial that it assisted her in learning this discipline. Her mother-in-law opposed Guyon in everything in a ridiculous and abusive manner. Rather than resist and stand up for her rights, she learned to submit to the wiles her husband, her mother-in-law, and even her maid. Guyon's desire to master submissiveness was rooted in her desire to be totally dead to self and live only to God and his desires. "She enjoyed God so much that she attempted to stifle her own will and live totally in accord with His."⁶¹ By way of illustration, her mother-in-law would not send Guyon away when the smallpox virus was in their home. Rather than insist she leave to preserve her health, Madame Guyon submitted, knowing this decision would drastically affect her health, which it did almost to the point of death. Even then the mother-in-law would not allow any other physician but her own - who was not available - to come and tend to Guyon. Again, rather than insist she receive some medical care, she totally resigned herself into the hands of God and allowed this woman to have her way. Similarly, Madame Guyon was submissive to her husband even when he was sick, ornery, and abusive. At the point when no one else would serve him because of his sour disposition, she continued to, regardless of the abuse that was heaped upon her, because she desired to learn submission. She was content to submit to the will of her

⁶⁰ Foster, *Ibid.*, 111, 113.

⁶¹ John W. Cowart, *A Virtuous Woman in a Corrupt Court*, IVP, 1990, accessed March 2007; available from <http://www.cowart.info/John's%20Books/Guyon/Guyon.htm>. Internet.

family members even when she knew their desires were selfish and/or for monetary reasons.

Similarly, Guyon's submitted to her directors or confessors on a variety of subjects: she went on a retreat only when Father La Combe granted her permission to do so; she changed her plans even when it was a sacrifice for her and went where Father La Combe dictated, letting herself be conducted as a child; for the specifics of whether or not to go to Geneva, she consulted with Father Claude Martin whose letter agreed with that of Father La Combe; at another time, she submitted to Monsieur Bertot, her director, against her own view or judgment, being persuaded that he would infallibly tell her the will of God. (Later she concluded that man does speak as man but when we see things in the Lord, we see them in another light.) This kind of submission is exemplified in her obedient writing of her autobiography; she was ordered to burn the first copy, write another, and not omit anything. She did this with such submission that even the bishop was astonished at her punctual obedience of him, risking her life to obey him.

To learn this discipline further, Guyon submitted to various spiritual mentors heeding their advice if she knew their counsel did not opposed what the Lord had told her. She sought Mrs. Granger's advice on more modest dress and on greater matters of the heart since this woman understood the spiritual path that Madame Guyon was pursuing. Although her confessor and husband prohibited her from seeing Mrs. Granger, Guyon still attempted to see her frequently, assisted by providence, because she greatly desired that kind of guidance. When such connections were eventually stopped, Madame Guyon did not despair, realizing God was teaching her to be dependent on him alone and not on any human being. At a later time, when her brother, Father La Mothe, was openly

opposing her, she did not continually submit to his wishes when she knew his demands were not in accordance with God's will. On one occasion, she submitted to the Bishop's proposal although she felt it was not what the Lord required. She stated that she submissively yielded if only to acknowledge the many special favors he had given and she was assured that the Lord would make the necessary events happen.

Obviously, Guyon's ultimate submission was to the Lord. By way of illustration: He spoke to her directly in a dream that she was to go to Geneva, which she did in time. In another instance, Father La Combe wrote that he thought the Lord had great designs for her; her response was that everything was equal to her whether she was used for great things or not. When a confessor told her that God had already made known to her what he required, she was content to quit everything in submission to the Lord. Guyon knew she would be unable to do anything the Lord required if she performed them out of her will, but if she saw things in God, he could use her as he chose. When in her apartment with only the Holy Spirit as her director, she would submit to any interruptions he required, as frequently happened when one of her little children knocked at the door. Guyon stated that it was not the action of opening the door that pleased the Holy Spirit but her constant ready obedience to his will even in the minutest things. She writes that when she was obedient like that, her soul was like a leaf or a feather that moved whatever way it pleased the Lord. Even when the Holy Spirit kept her awake to write the words he gave, maybe allowing her one or two hours of sleep, she gladly submitted to him.⁶²

Madame Guyon grew in submission to the point where she had no will of her own but completely submitted to her Spouse, wanting only to serve the Lord who possessed

⁶² Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 16.

her. She loved everything in God and so was able to bear the faults of others and serve and oblige them. It was essential to her to learn complete submission since abandonment was the key to the inner court where she cast off all selfish caring and became completely at his divine disposal.⁶³ When she was unable to decide to go with the New Catholics nor received any direction from her spiritual mentors, she experienced again that the Providence of God alone ordered everything so she could submit to what he set in place without reservation. If, in moments of weakness, she reflected humanly on her undertakings, her faith staggered, but when she relied on the Holy Spirit's guidance, her courage was restored. For example, when her little daughter's health began to fail, Madame Guyon was not sure whether or not to take the girl with her. She sought assistance from her directors; not receiving an answer, she became resigned to the will of God. During another crisis, when she was unsure of what to do and found no human wisdom to guide her, she writes that God kept her so dependent on his orders that he did not let her know ahead of time what she was to be doing; rather the divine movement of his providence determined everything. In that she was content. Her vow of perpetual chastity and poverty also included a vow of obedient submission, wherein she resolved to obey the church, believing that to be God's will. For Madame Guyon, this kind of submission led to a deeper dependence on the Holy Spirit. She writes that "perfect obedience to the will of the Lord, submission to the church, and honor to Jesus Christ in loving himself only...when by the loss of ourselves we are passed into the Lord, our will is made one and the same with that of the Lord, according to the prayer of Christ... for as

⁶³ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter VI 1, 2, 3.

it is the Lord who wills in the soul, that will has its effect.”⁶⁴ When being in God’s will meant undergoing cruel persecutions, Madame Guyon willingly submitted as a living sacrifice to her Lord.

Through a rugged and humanly impossible spiritual pilgrimage, Madame Guyon learned the discipline of submission to such an extent that she no longer desired to have her own way but was happy and content when the Lord had his. She learned and lived in a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit. She endured and performed in submission, in thankfulness, and in silence whatever God in his providence sent.⁶⁵

Service

If service is the most conducive way to grow in humility,⁶⁶ and if it is the discipline in which we experience the many little deaths by going beyond ourselves,⁶⁷ as Foster claims, we can again look to the life of Madame Guyon to see this discipline lived out. From an early age, she witnessed and then herself assisted in taking care of the poor, even taking linen to their homes. She taught them the catechism, and when her parents were out, would invite the poor into her home, have them eat with her while she served them, doing so with great respect. When her father was ill, she deliberately tended to him, performing the most menial, unnoticed services, doing so deliberately in an attempt to mortify herself and pay honor to what Jesus said to do. Though these acts were all acts of service and expressions of her love, in time she would be persecuted for these same deeds.

⁶⁴ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 3.

⁶⁵ Guyon, *Gems* #8.

⁶⁶ Foster, *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

After her mother, a great mentor in working with the poor, died, Madame Guyon continued to strive for growth in her spiritual life, applying herself to all her duties, including visiting the poor in their homes and helping them in their distresses. Besides her propensity towards this service, she was very intentional in this discipline for the purpose of subduing her spirit. Along with attending to the sick and the poor, Guyon also tried to serve those in her household, including her own servants. Although her family was often cruel and insulting to her, frequently bringing her to tears, Guyon deliberately continued to perform the lowest offices for them to humble herself. As mentioned, when her husband was very ill and in such poor temper that neither the servants nor his mother would tend to him, Guyon continued to lovingly minister to him withstanding the rough and cruel treatment, again, because she deliberately sought this lesson in humility.

Madame Guyon's tenderness for the poor continued throughout her life; she remained extremely diligent in acts of charity, often criticizing herself for the plenty she enjoyed. She ensured young girls were educated so they could earn their own livelihood and she assisted tradesmen and mechanics so they could keep their shops. John W. Cowart notes that she devoted herself to charitable works such as funding hospitals, giving scholarships, building churches, funding monasteries and convents, and caring for poor families. Her giving apparently became so extensive that she had to hire someone to disperse the gift anonymously.⁶⁸ She gave people clothes; she deprived herself of much in order to help the less fortunate, giving them the very best from her table, not just the leftovers. She saw herself as the steward of what was theirs in the first place. Following a winter of extreme scarcity, she increased her charity, distributing bread on a weekly

⁶⁸ Cowart, *Ibid.*

basis and kept boys and girls employed. She discovered with great joy that although she gave abundantly, the Lord ensured that her family was never without.

With regard to the sick, she was equally diligent. She would visit them, make their beds, dress their wounds, and perform lowly jobs for them, including burying their dead. Her heart was open to any in need. Her most difficult case was tending to a sick soldier whose condition was so nauseous that no one could go near him. With her usual tenderness, she dressed his wounds, caring for him till he died. Yet even in tasks like these, which most would see as selfless giving, she saw her love for the Lord mixed with self-love and she longed for total humility that would free her from herself and allow her to serve others as the Lord did.

However, after her soul was “perfectly delivered from all its pain” on Magdalene’s Day, Madame Guyon had a new kind of blessing that seemed to increase daily, leaving more of herself out of the picture. She performed countless good deeds without selfishness or premeditation. She continued to care for the sick and dress their wounds, but now God gave her many cures, cures she liberally shared. When she later assisted in the establishment of a hospital for the poor, she had few funds to give but shared with them with the ointments and medicine the Lord had given her. Enemies accused her of wasting her children’s substance in establishing hospitals, but Guyon saw these as being established on the fund of Divine Providence, an inexhaustible fund.⁶⁹

Her desires for service went beyond merely tending to the poor and the sick; she wanted to start a training center where people who wanted to truly serve God and give themselves to his service could go for training. Madame Guyon also served as a spiritual

⁶⁹ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 18.

mentor or mother to many individuals. Smith comments that through her work, *Justifications*, Guyon strikingly realized her desire to be a spiritual mentor to many since the text was very nurturing and informative for spiritual living.⁷⁰ Also, the Lord often gave her insight into and words for people, enabling her to minister to their spirits and lead many to the Lord. In one instance, she effectively ministered to a sister who was suicidal and whom no other sister in the convent was able to reach. The Lord showed Guyon what the heart issue was, making it possible to assist this sister and deliver her from twenty-two years of trouble.

Madame Guyon's desire to deliberately humble herself, so the Lord could use her as he chose, bore much fruit in her life. Her humility remains a model of the humility that comes when we die to ourselves; as John Wesley put it, "How few such instances do we find of exalted love to God, and our neighbor; of genuine humility, of invincible meekness and unbounded resignation."⁷¹

Corporate Disciplines – Confession

Confession, states Foster, is a consciously chosen course of action that brings us to the feet of our God whose desire is to give and to forgive, as is evidenced in the cross.⁷² Madam Guyon so desired a pure relationship with her Lord, one unencumbered by her sins, that she very willingly confessed her sins, asking him to scrutinize her life to see if there was any evil ways in her. She saw sin as so malignant that when hard pressed, we even make use of the holiest and most reasonable pretexts for its existence.⁷³

⁷⁰ Smith, *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷¹ *Who Is Jeanne Guyon?* Accessed March 2007; available from <http://www.thelastdays.net/whoguyon.htm>. Internet.

⁷² Foster, *Ibid.*, 143, 145.

⁷³ Jeanne Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God; And of the State of Union*, #46.

She advises that people lay their whole souls open to God, who will make clear the nature of their faults, so they can repent and completely abandon sin. Her own humility in confession of personal weaknesses and struggles is plain throughout her autobiography; in fact, she comments that anyone reading her work will see weakness, sin, and infidelity on her part but only goodness, mercy, and love on God's.⁷⁴

Even as a young lady, her fervent confessions and willingness to forgive others surprised her confessor. She confessed frequently and sincerely, often weeping and praying. She confessed to vanities, to boasting, to enjoying the love of others, to exposing too much of her neck. She confessed that she could not meditate or exert her imagination to pray nor could she pray extensively about anything. She scrutinized all the secret places of her heart to find the smallest defects, noting that she had “too much of an earnest attachment, vain complaisance, unprofitable and tedious conversations.”⁷⁵

Her confessors did not always hear her heart or her sincere desire to rid it of any blemish. For example, after a period in which she received many visits and compliments, she confessed that she was finding her virtue from man, not from God. Her confessor only compared her to what she could have been rather than what she was. He flattered her pride, seeing her sin as a slight fault rather than something highly displeasing to God. But for Madame Guyon, her sin was very serious; she explains that the heinousness of sin is not measured only by its nature but also by the person who commits the sins;⁷⁶ her desire, therefore, was to remove any barriers between her and God regardless of how minute they seemed. Her later confessor, Father La Combe, a man also in ardent pursuit

⁷⁴ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 14.

⁷⁵ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 24.

⁷⁶ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 14.

of an intimate relationship with God, understood her better and was able to assist her in this mission. She wrote her confession to him, telling him her blackest secrets, her ingratitude, and how far she was from God. La Combe heard her heart and was thereby able to restore her peace and calmness.

Madame Guyon was strikingly realistic about sin, stating that we have no right to complain to God; it is we who depart from him when we disobey him, so we should not be surprised at our defects or failings. In fact, the more miserable we see ourselves, the more we can abandon ourselves to God and press in for help. Each time we return to God, he receives us. If, on the other hand, we keep ourselves from him, he will use the “most engaging motives” to win us back, as she experienced. At a time when she was ensnared by her shortcomings, the pain that she felt afterwards was inexpressible; she said it was as if she had been banished from the presence of her Beloved.⁷⁷ Yet when she repented, Guyon experienced the Lord receiving her with open arms, assuring her again of his love for her. In spite of the forgiveness, those times filled her with painful reflections on her sin because she offended the very one who so profusely showered his grace on her. She realized her horrible ingratitude compared to his incomparable goodness and was grateful the Lord’s strong hand brought her back to his throne of grace.

Prior to her father passing away, Monsieur Bertot was assigned to be Madame Guyon’s director, much to her satisfaction. However, whenever she tried to confess to him, she could not, finding that most thoughts vanished from her mind. Her intention had been to build a solid and useful relationship with him, but, because of this silence, that never happened. She realized that although this had not been her plan, it served her well

⁷⁷ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 13.

because as every support was taken away from her, she truly died to herself and became wholly dependent on her Lord.

Madame Guyon experienced being at the feet of God. Through the discipline of confession, she felt the immersion of her soul into God, barely able to speak as she experienced this death of self. She knew her Father's desire to give and to forgive and loved no place better than the cross.

Worship

Foster opens the chapter on the *Discipline of Worship* by quoting William Temple, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."⁷⁸ Although Madame Guyon seldom writes specifically of worship as we commonly speak of it today, her life was a reflection of that holy obedience, God having absolute priority in her life. She often sought the sacrament of communion, retreating to a church or chapel for prayer whenever possible, even if it had to be undetected, because she was determined to spend time worshipping her Lord, regardless of the consequences. Guyon writes about going to the divine services or sacraments, but other than mentioning that these were seen as an offense to her mother-in-law, she does not discuss the particulars. For a time her maid tried to prevent her from attending communion, a very painful experience for Guyon since the only satisfaction of her life was to receive the sacrament and to honor God. Prayer, communion, and spending time alone with her Lord were expressions of worship central to her life.

⁷⁸ Foster, *Ibid.*, 158.

Her times of worship led to times of absorption into her Lord. At the age of nineteen, Madame Guyon attended the services where the father was known to be a good preacher. During one service, when she walked into the building she was unable to hear the sermon; at that moment, she was so strongly absorbed in God that she could not even open her eyes or hear anything that was spoken. She settled into an inward state of prayer feeling totally immersed in God. Again, at the dedication of that same chapel, she was inwardly seized for the five-hour period of the ceremony; it was during this time that God made a new consecration to her. Later, on the day she annually renewed her spiritual marriage with her Redeemer, as she partook of communion, she experienced much joy as it seemed as though God was powerfully uniting himself to her.

As another expression of worship, Guyon gave the church what she could to furnish it with ornaments and silver plates and chalices. Her life epitomized one who lived by the principles of a holy God. She sought to feed her mind with the truth of God, to cleanse her imagination by the beauty of God (as witnessed through her poems), to open her heart to his love, and to devote herself to fulfill his purpose.

Guidance

Like the people of the early church, we need to deliberately take extended periods of time to pray, fast, and worship in order to discern the Lord's will.⁷⁹ Further, Foster points out, we need to seek intentional spiritual guidance from others, including historical characters⁸⁰ and spiritual directors or mentors. During Madame Guyon's time, having a spiritual director was a normal and expected thing. The director was to be concerned

⁷⁹ Ibid., 177.

⁸⁰ Foster., Ibid., 180.

about the whole person and the interrelationship of all of life; this arrangement assumed the one being mentored would submit to this kind of guidance in all areas, not just one's spiritual life. Foster points out that if we are unable to listen to our brother, we are unable to listen to the Holy Spirit; he also states, however, that blind obedience to our brother is not required, since there is always the danger of manipulation and control by humans.⁸¹ All these aspects are, once again, seen in Madame Guyon's life.

Although Madame Guyon did seek intentional guidance from others, including through reading the works of St. Francis de Sales, Madam Chantal and Thomas à Kempis, her primary director was always the Holy Spirit. When earthly affairs seemed to point in a certain direction, she consistently tried to look higher, as she put it, and see that all the affairs of life are directed by Providence, always for our eternal advantage.⁸² As the persecution against her increased, her total reliance on her Supreme Director also increased, leaving her with a peaceful mind and heart. She writes elsewhere that nothing makes nature die so deeply and quickly as to find and seek no earthly support and no earthly consolation.⁸³

Already as a youth with various confessors and teachers put in her path, Madame Guyon exhibited discernment as to the kind of person she needed as a spiritual director. She met the monk from the order of St. Francis who told her to seek the Lord within her heart - the advice that changed her life forever; she requested he become her director. He was resistant to this because he had promised God he would never take on the direction of someone of the opposite sex, but because of the pressure Guyon put on him, he sought

⁸¹ Ibid., 187.

⁸² Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapters, 7.

⁸³ Guyon, *Gems* #5.

the Lord's will again. When this director thought the Lord told him not to fear Madame Guyon because she was His spouse, the spiritual director relationship was formed. Later in life, when Guyon was considering joining the New Catholics, this same monk spoke into her life; he approved of her design to leave everything for the Lord but cautioned her against joining the New Catholics and even more against telling them that she "walked in the inward path." Although she did not necessarily tell them that outright, she writes that it is a difficult thing to hide from people and again conceded to God's plans for her. This director was concerned about the whole of Madame Guyon and her interrelationship of all of life and proved to give her godly council.

In many ways, Madame Guyon was equally obedient and submissive to her other directors. While living with her family and the abusive maid, she spoke of the hardships with her director. In one instance, he told her to make the offensive maid a gift; although it was difficult to turn the other cheek, she gave the girl a gift, much to the maid's astonishment. Another time, at the annual renewal of her vows to the Lord, she added a vow of chastity and sought to make it perpetual only if her director permitted it. Later, when a Bishop wanted her to go to Marseilles, she checked with her director, then, Father La Combe, going only when he consented. Sometimes she was given counsel, which she followed in spite of her better judgment. Once she felt she needed to lay down her own experiences when duty asked her to believe and obey her spiritual director, being persuaded that he would tell her the will of God infallibly. Her submissive manner was

the same when her spiritual children knocked on her door and the Spirit required she open it; this she did with obedient submission.⁸⁴

The Lord delighted Madame Guyon by speaking through confessors she did not know. In one case, she was obliged to go to Paris for some business and entered a dark church to make confession to an unknown confessor. The Lord spoke to her through this man, telling her that she already knew what God required of her; she responded in obedience. Similarly, Father La Combe often served as a guide and spiritual mentor for her; to him she usually responded in obedience because he believed in the inward way as she did; but, even with this father, Guyon continued to use her own discernment, aiming to hear God's heart and will in every instance.

Although she sought spiritual guidance, Madame Guyon did not think it wise for her to readily resign herself to others' opinions and look upon their advice as discretion rather than be wholly resigned to God. Not all her spiritual guides were beneficial to her. At one point, Mother Granger assigned Monsieur Bertot to be her director, but this relationship did not prove to be fruitful because Guyon was unable to speak with him, as mentioned earlier. (He later wrote to her to take another director.) Guyon felt that every earthly support was taken from her, making her truly die to herself. Soon after this, she was accused of mortal sin and had no one to speak with - no confessor, no director, no friend, no counselor. She had lost everything. She writes, "...and after God had taken from me one after another, He withdrew also Himself. I remained without any creature; and to complete my distress, I seemed to be left without God, who alone could support

⁸⁴ Plantinga, Book II, Chapter 7.

me in such a deeply distressing state.”⁸⁵ During her husband’s life time, she wished to speak to a person of distinction and wrote to that person, but soon afterwards felt remorse because a voice spoke to her heart, “What,--dost thou seek for ease and to shake off my yoke?” She immediately cancelled this arrangement (which was met with resentment) and tried to be wholly resigned to God.⁸⁶

Almost naturally, Madame Guyon became what we today call a peer mentor for others in the church. At the age of nineteen, she sought Mother Granger as a spiritual director; this readily became a mutually edifying relationship. Similarly, Guyon was used as a peer mentor for a bishop. As already noted, on more than one occasion, the Lord used her to speak directly into people’s lives, although some church authorities were chagrined that a woman would be so much “flocked to, and so much sought after.”⁸⁷ Through her mentoring, some women became “sensible, solid women, exemplary in piety”;⁸⁸ others were converted; yet others, including Father La Combe, were led in the interior path of the soul; many ecclesiastics confessed their sins to her. Her words and also her writings served to direct numerous people as the works increased in circulation and popularity. Her most famous disciple was Francois de Salignac de la Mothe-Fenelon (Abbe Fenelon), whom she was inwardly led to seek and guide to grow in faith and knowledge of God.⁸⁹ In turn, God used this relationship to expand her circle of influence. Through Fenelon, Madame Guyon was able to penetrate the religious circles at

⁸⁵ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 22.

⁸⁶ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 26.

⁸⁷ Plantinga, Book II, Chapter 16.

⁸⁸ Plantinga, Book II, Chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Guenin-Lelle, Ibid.

court, which eventually led her to the palace⁹⁰ and to Madame Maintenon, the head of a girls' school.

The Lord used Madame Guyon mightily in the lives of countless others. *In The Way to God and of The State of Union*, she concludes that God destines some souls for the assistance of others in the most tangled paths. Because she no longer had any anxiety in regard to herself nor had anything to lose, God could use her to bring others into the way of his pure, naked, and assured will.⁹¹ She was asked to educate young noblewoman at Madame de Maintenon's school. Guyon also served as a spiritual director or mother for so many people that sometimes she did not have time to eat. She states that the Lord said she would be a mother of a great people, telling her they would be a people simple and childlike. To that end, she traveled through France and Switzerland, teaching others to pray and challenging them to live holy lives.⁹² In her role as their director, she was able to bring "her children" to walk in the way the Lord led them. As noted, she assisted a young sister in avoiding the pitfalls of an inappropriate relationship with an ecclesiastic, teaching her about and drawing her into the subject of inward prayer. Ironically, as the persecutions against her rose, she was given even more spiritual children. Her retreat at Blois became a place of regular pilgrimages for admirers, both French and foreign. "Indeed, she is one of the many prophetesses whose fame has stood highest out of their own country."⁹³ Often she would make no announcement of her presence in a town but within days would receive a steady stream of visits from people seeking spiritual help.

⁹⁰ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon" [book on-line], accessed March 2007; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07092b.htm>. Internet.

⁹¹ Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the State of Union*, #72.

⁹² *Who Is Jeanne Guyon?* <http://www.thelastdays.net/whoguyon.htm>. Internet.

⁹³ Wikipedia Encyclopedia, *Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte*, accessed March 2007. Internet.

Cowart writes that “milkmaids and knights, bishops and drunks, streetwalkers and nuns, monks and merchants – all felt strangely moved to seek the prayers and counsel of this quiet woman who kept to her own house praying. The line formed at dawn and the last visitor seldom left before midnight. Some turned to Christ; some left to throw rocks at her windows; regardless of their lot and mindset, she prayed with all.”⁹⁴

Foster mentions that spiritual directors can be in danger of using manipulation and control. Madame Guyon definitely experienced this negative side of the discipline of guidance as well, even though her sole crime was that of supreme devotion and immeasurable attachment of her whole being to the one she loved.⁹⁵ As noted, not all her spiritual directors understood the intensity of her heart. Although she confessed her sins with true and deep remorse, they did not always take her seriously, in one case even telling others she was a saint. When that particular director realized that Guyon had chosen another director in his place and was steering down a different road, he declared openly against her with the other monks of his order joining him, even preaching publicly against her. After her father passed away, this same confessor restrained Madame Guyon because he did not understand her journey or her method of communication with her heavenly father. In a later chapter, she writes that when she went to confessors, she could not tell them anything about her condition because not only would they not understand her but would regard as virtues what she saw as sin. Towards the end of her life, her own brother, Father La Mothe, persecuted her in many ways, even insisting on becoming her director. He sent her many abusive letters stating that if she did not put herself under his

⁹⁴ Cowart, *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Nancy Missler, *Nancy Missler Speaks of Jeanne Guyon*, accessed March 2007; available from <http://www.thelastdays.net/whoguyon2.htm>. Internet.

direction, she was undone. When seeking guidance on how to handle her brother, other fathers advised she use deceit; since deceit was incongruent with her life, she did nothing. She neither justified nor defended herself, leaving the case entirely up to God to do as he pleased, ready to endure pain and torture if he so willed. This eventually led to her imprisonment but imprisonment of her body only since in her portable sanctuary she was able to rejoice in and be with the Lord even while in prison.

Madame Guyon definitely strove to discern the Lord's will through extended periods of prayer, fasting, and worship. She also intentionally sought spiritual guidance from others, realizing her ultimate guide was the Holy Spirit. Her relationship with the Lord was so solid that the manipulation and control others tried to use against her could not deter her, for she was dead to herself and therefore to the wiles of others. Guyon solely lived and died for her Lord.

Celebration

In his description of the final corporate discipline, it again appears as though Foster is examining Madame Guyon's life. He writes that only obedience will produce joy in the spiritual life; to elicit genuine celebration and joy, obedience must work itself into the ordinary fabric of every day living.⁹⁶ At the beginning of her autobiography, Guyon writes that we glorify God most when we prevent what may offend him. Her very existence was to prevent from offending him in any way and to breathe every breath and make every move only towards him. She judged nothing else but the love of God as worthy to occupy her heart. Her resignation to God was so strong that she was fearless,

⁹⁶ Foster, *Ibid.*, 192.

content, and free. She had the “secret fruition of a joy unspeakable,”⁹⁷ minding nothing else but the friendship of God.

On the Magdalene’s day when she was delivered from all her pains, she was “inexpressibly overjoyed to find Him, whom I thought I had lost forever, returned to me again with unspeakable magnificence and purity.” For her, that one day of happiness in the Lord was worth more than all the years of suffering.⁹⁸ She writes of persons who are ravished with joy in the Lord, as she herself experienced an inexpressible satisfaction, peace, and joy in suffering and being a prisoner for Jesus. Her obedience wavered while a young child, but she increasingly sought to weave utter abandonment to the Lord’s will into the everyday fabric of her life. As she did, her life was no longer the “every day” life but a life of immense crosses, hardships, and persecutions one the one hand, while on the other hand, she lived such a celebrative and victorious life that even her detractors had to confess that it was apparent that she never left the presence of God.⁹⁹ Guyon writes that the soul that lives uninterruptedly in God lives in “inexpressible happiness, though loaded with the sufferings which God lays upon it for others.”¹⁰⁰

Death of Self

Madame Guyon knew that although the soul was created to enjoy its God and to conform to all his pleasures, self-will blocks people from living out this in-born, God-given purpose. Unless there was a total death to self, this purpose remains unfulfilled and we will never truly live. It was to that end, that she used the spiritual disciplines.

⁹⁷ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 15.

⁹⁸ Plantinga, Book I, Chapter 27.

⁹⁹ Rose, Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the State of Union*, #66.

Guyon recognized that for most there is a gradual causing of the self-will to die. In fact, death of self is so extremely difficult that few truly die to self. In her blunt and realistic style, she writes, "... if souls had courage enough to resign themselves to the work of purification, without having any weak and foolish pity on themselves, what a noble, rapid and happy progress would they make! But few are willing to lose the earth. If they advance some steps, as soon as the sea is ruffled they are dejected; they cast anchor, and often desist from the prosecution of the voyage. Such disorders doth selfish interest and self-love occasion. It is of consequence not to look too much at one's own state, not to lose courage, not to afford any nourishment to self-love, which is so deep-rooted, that its empire is not easily demolished."¹⁰¹ In *Gems - the Spiritual Maxims*, she counsels that we must use all our strength for the destruction of self and be as much an enemy of self as we seek to be a friend of God;¹⁰² hence the role of disciplines.

From her life experience, she noted that not many are actually willing to die completely to themselves. "...There are others who, being called of God to die to themselves, yet pass all their time in a dying life, in inward agonies, without ever entering into God through death and a total loss of self, because they are always willing to retain something under plausible pretexts, and so never lose themselves to the whole extent of the designs of God. They never enjoy God in all His fullness; which is a loss that cannot be perfectly known in this life."¹⁰³ Guyon further describes various levels of commitment in *Gems - Spiritual Torrents* pointing out the levels of death to self and life in God. As long as any portion of our self-will exists, it absolutely hinders the grace of God from

¹⁰¹ Plantinga, Book II, Chapter 8.

¹⁰² Guyon, *Gems*, #8, 9.

¹⁰³ Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 27.

operating in us. She points out that the devil can only hurt us in so far as we retain any attachment to our corrupt selves; for our soul to be pure, it must depend on God alone so that all things are experienced in him. Practicing the spiritual disciplines will assist us because they remove our natural tendencies to follow our will.

Madame Guyon understood that God used great sufferings, mortification, and deadness to all but God to fix her into a continual devotion to him in the shortest way possible. Because she desired this, these crosses became the object of her rejoicing to such an extent that she found no pleasure but in suffering for him. For her it became a total death of everything that was hers, both inward and outward, so that she passed into her Lord and her will was his will. To that end, she continually used spiritual disciplines and subjected herself to many mortifications and hardships in her attempt to put her flesh to death and to experience the cross. She chose to enter into the most profound nothingness to assist in the death of her self. Yet, even these hardships did not satisfy her heart, for she saw only her ingratitude compared to God's unmatched goodness. When others treated her cruelly, she accepted that as instruments of God's mercy and justice to perform a work in her. At one point, she was poisoned and suffered the effects for about seven years but was so resolved to suffer everything and to receive whatever God gave her that she did not try defend herself, seeing greater value in her humiliation and condemnation by others than in self defense. She would rather God crush her entirely than she take honor on herself. All these mortifications aided her in dying to herself. In *The Way to God and of The State of Union*, she writes, "...by this constant practice,

accompanied by the gracious Unction before referred to, the Spirit gets the upper hand of Nature, and the interior part comes under subjection without resistance.”¹⁰⁴

As her soul was slowly transformed, her will increasingly changed and passed into that of God and the more God himself willed for her soul.¹⁰⁵ Guyon noticed changes in herself. For example, when her youngest boy died, she was able to say as Job did, “You give and take away,” instead of mourning and grieving her loss as she might have done previously. After the small pox left her face badly marked, she would not take medicine to help with its healing, feeling God check her on her pride for her looks. When her family pressured her to give up her estate, she did so with joy because she was becoming more conformed to Jesus and unattached to her possessions. She said the Lord assisted her so greatly that she could no longer harbor any resentment against those who hated her but felt compassion for them instead. In another instance, she noticed that not only was she given the ability to bear the faults of a lady, whose manners she could scarcely bear, but even had a desire to please and oblige that woman. She was given insights into people’s lives and souls were saved through her work. When she was in any physical danger she did not fear or fret as others around her did, but was perfectly at peace, allowing the Lord to do what he pleased. These changes testify to dying to self so she could live increasingly in God’s will.

When God took away all Guyon’s supports, she truly died to herself. She states, “There is nothing which makes nature die so much as to find neither support nor consolation.”¹⁰⁶ She no longer had any will of her own, only the love and will of God.

¹⁰⁴ Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the State of Union*, #11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, #70.

¹⁰⁶ Planting, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 25.

God did not always explain to her what would happen, but she was completely content to let him have his way in everything. She left herself to God without hesitation, ready to endure any pain and tortures if he willed. By dying to self, the Lord's will was finally and completely also her will; from *conform* to *uniform*,¹⁰⁷ she had "expired in the arms of Love."¹⁰⁸ "The Soul thus possessed of God, finds that He is so perfectly Lord over it, that it can no longer do anything but what He pleases and as He pleases; and this state goes on increasingly. Its powerlessness is no longer painful but pleasant, because it is full of the Life and Power of the Divine Will."¹⁰⁹ At one point she enjoyed periods of comfort and peace; now she enjoyed the Giver himself, not just his gifts.¹¹⁰

Not by Works

Although Guyon places a tremendous emphasis on self-denial, she teaches that there is nothing humans can accomplish through their own acts. Her critique of both the Catholics and Protestants was that they spent too much energy on empty forms of religious practices while overlooking internal purity and truth,¹¹¹ the goal of self-denial and spiritual disciplines. We must, indeed, die to self, but not by hollow practices or our own efforts because then we would have saved ourselves. Madame Guyon discovered that very early on in her journey and yet continued with the struggle of trusting in her own works versus surrendering to God. Initially, she examined herself very strictly writing down her faults from week to week and then from month to month to see if she had improved. What she found was that her efforts greatly tired her, were of little use,

¹⁰⁷ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter XXIV.8.

¹⁰⁸ Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the State of Union*, #35.

¹⁰⁹ Guyon, *Concise View of the Way to God: And of the State of Union* #50.

¹¹⁰ Guyon, *Gems*, #7.

¹¹¹ Cowart, *Ibid*.

and brought her no satisfaction. At one point, she petitions God with tears, undergoing much pain and effort for the Lord but seeing little fruit. The fruit began to appear after the Lord, “Beholding me rowing with laborious toil, the breath of Thy divine operations turned in my favor and carried me full sail over this sea of affliction.” The picture Guyon paints here is of herself as poor, ready to die of hunger, while nearby was a table set with a feast. All God wanted from her was to simply turn her mind inward and know his presence.¹¹² What was required of her and is asked of us is to stop doing “self-activity.” Stopping self-activity definitely requires our effort because God never robs people of their free will.¹¹³ On our part, we need to cooperate in and desire to mortify our flesh, but this death to self requires profound prayer, and both acknowledging and throwing our dependence on God. “When the Divine Truth penetrates to their centre, it discovers many a theft from God in their course, and teaches them that the only way to secure themselves is by abandonment without reserve to God, and submission to his guidance, for whenever we endeavor to bring about our own perfection, or that of others by our own efforts, the result is simply imperfection.”¹¹⁴ “We must cease self action and self exertion that God himself may act alone.”¹¹⁵

As Guyon writes in *Gems*, “Self-seeking is the gate by which our soul departs from peace while total abandonment to the will of God is the way by which it returns.”¹¹⁶ By worldly standards, she paid an immense, humanly impossible price in pursuing her Spouse. But the fruit of her journey is evident in her own life and in the wake she left in

¹¹² Plantinga, *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 8.

¹¹³ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer* Chapter XXIV.6.

¹¹⁴ Guyon, *Gems* #32.

¹¹⁵ Guyon, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, Chapter XII.2

¹¹⁶ Guyon, *Gems* #51.

the Catholic Church and in many individual lives, both in the eighteenth century and ours.

This paper began with a discussion on the discipline of meditation, which, Foster claims, boldly calls us into the living presence of our God. Guyon willingly lived in the living presence of our God, using the spiritual disciplines for successful spiritual transformation. To borrow a term from *Renovation of the Heart*, Madame Guyon had VIM;¹¹⁷ she had a vision of what it meant to be transformed into Christlikeness. This vision gave her the strength, energy, and virtue needed to pursue her goal and be liberated from the oppressive slavery to self and to fear. Her intention was clear: die to self and live to God, becoming increasingly like him. This intention, along with her desire and determination to realize her goal, increased as she came to know both herself and her Lord better. She saw his beauty in contrast to her sin and the many obstacles in her life, and then zealously sought the means to live unencumbered by them. Madame Guyon's life models the use of the spiritual disciplines to bring us into this life-transforming presence. As it did during her lifetime, her example still beckons us in the twenty-first century to grow into Christlikeness.

¹¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO NavPress, 2002) 88.

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