



Leighton's
RULES & INSTRUCTIONS
FOR A
HOLY LIFE.

by
ROBERT LEIGHTON. D.D.
(1611 - 1684)

Principle of the University of Edinburgh.
Afterwards Bishop of Dunblane
‡
Archbishop of Glasgow.



For disposing you the better to observe these rules and profit by them, be pleased to take the following advices:

1. Put all your trust in the special and singular mercy of God, that He for His mercy's sake, and of His only goodness, will help and bring you to perfection. Not that absolute perfection is attainable here, but the meaning is, to high degrees of that spiritual and Divine life, which is always growing and tending towards the absolute perfection above; but in some persons comes nearer to that, and riseth higher, even here, than in the most. If you with hearty and fervent desires do continually wish and long for it, and with most humble devotion daily pray unto God, and call for it, and with all diligence do busily labour and travail to come to it, undoubtedly it shall be given you. For you must not think it sufficient to use exercises, as though they had such virtues in them, that, of themselves alone, they could make such as do use them perfect; for neither those nor any other, whatever they be, can of themselves (by their use only) bring unto perfection. But our merciful Lord God, of His own goodness, when you seek with hearty desires and fervent sighings, maketh you to find it. When you ask daily with devout prayer, then He giveth it to you; and when you continually, with

unwearied labour and travail, knock perseveringly, then He doth mercifully open unto you. And because those exercises do teach you to seek, ask, and knock, yea, they are none other than very devout petitions, seekings, and spiritual pulsations for the merciful help of God; therefore they are very profitable means to come to perfection by God's grace.

2. Let no particular exercise hinder your public and standing duties to God and your neighbours; but for these, rather intermit the other for a time, and then return to it as soon as you can.

3. If, in time of your spiritual exercise, you find yourself drawn to any better, or to as good a contemplation as that is, follow the track of that good motion so long as it shall last.

4. Always take care to follow such exercises of devout thoughts, withal putting in practice such lessons as they contain and excite to.

5. Though at first ye feel no sweetness in such exercises, yet be not discouraged, nor induced to leave them, but continue in them faithfully, whatsoever pain or spiritual trouble ye feel: for, doing them for God and His honour, and finding

none other present fruit, yet, you shall have an excellent reward for your diligent labour and your pure intentions. And let not your falling short of these models and rules, nor your daily manifold imperfections and faults, dishearten you: but continue steadfast in your desires, purposes, and endeavours; and ever ask the best, aim at the best, and hope the best, being sorry that you can do no better; and they shall be a most acceptable sacrifice in the sight of God, and in due time you shall reap if you faint not. And of all such instructions let your rule be, to follow them as much as you can; but not too scrupulously thinking your labour lost if you do not exactly and strictly answer them in every thing. Purpose still better, and by God's grace all shall be well.

SECTION I.

Rule 1. Exercise thyself in the knowledge and deep consideration of our Lord God, calling humbly to mind how excellent and incomprehensible He is: and this knowledge shalt thou rather endeavour to obtain by fervent desire and devout prayer, than by high study and outward labour. It is the singular gift of God, and certainly very precarious.

2. Pray, then, *“Most gracious Lord, whom to know is the very bliss and felicity of man's soul, and yet none can know « Thee, unless Thou wilt open and shew Thyself unto him; vouchsafe of Thy infinite mercy, now and ever, to enlighten my heart and mind to know Thee, and Thy most holy and perfect will, to the honour and glory of Thy name. Amen.”*

3. Then lift up thy heart to consider (not with too great violence, but soberly) the eternal and infinite power of God, who created all things by His excellent wisdom; His unmeasurable goodness, and incomprehensible love: for He is very and only God, most excellent, most high, most glorious, the everlasting and unchangeable goodness, an eternal substance, a charity infinite, so excellent and ineffable in Himself, that all dignity, perfection, and goodness, that is possible to be spoken or thought of, cannot sufficiently express the smallest part thereof.

4. Consider that He is the natural place, the centre and rest of thy soul. If thou then think of the most blessed Trinity, muse not too much thereon, but with devout and obedient faith, meekly and lowly adore and worship.

5. Consider Jesus the Redeemer and Husband of thy soul, and walk with him as becomes a chaste spouse,

with reverence and lowly shamefulness, obedience, and submission.

6. Then turn to the deep, profound consideration of thyself, thine own nothingness, and thy extreme defilement and pollution, thy natural aversion from God, and that thou must, by conversion to Him again, and union with Him, be made happy.

7. Consider thyself and all creatures as nothing, in comparison of thy Lord; that so thou mayest not only be content, but desirous to be unknown, or being known, to be contemned and despised of all men, yet without thy faults or deservings, as much as thou canst.

8. Pray: *“O God, infuse into my heart Thy heavenly light and blessed charity, that I may know and love Thee above all things; and above all things loathe and abhor myself. Grant that I may be so ravished in the wonder and love of Thee, that I may forget myself, and all things; feel neither prosperity nor adversity; may not fear to suffer all the pains of this world, rather than to be parted and pulled away from Thee, whose perfections infinitely exceed all thought and understanding. O! let me find Thee more inwardly and verily present with me, than I am with myself; and make me most circumspect*

how I do use myself in the presence of Thee, my holy Lord. Cause me always to remember how everlasting and constant is the love Thou bearest towards me, and such a charity and continual care as though Thou hadst no more creatures in heaven or earth besides me. What am I? a vile worm and filth.”

9. Then aspire to a great contrition for thy sins, and hatred of them, an abhorring of thyself for them; then crave pardon in the blood of Jesus Christ; and then offer up thyself, soul and body, an oblation or sacrifice, in and through him; as they did of old, laying wood on the altar, and then burning up all: so this shall be a sacrifice of sweet savour, and very acceptable to God.

10. Offer all that thou hast, to be nothing, to use nothing of all that thou hast about thee and is called thine, but to His honour and glory; and resolve, through His grace, to use all the powers of thy soul, and every member of thy body, to His service, as formerly thou hast done to sin.

11. Consider the passion of thy Lord, how he was buffeted, scourged, reviled, stretched with nails on the cross, and hung on it three long hours; suffered

all the contempt and shame, and all the inconceivable pain of it, for thy sake.

12. Then turn thy heart to Him, humbly saying, *“Lord Jesus, whereas I daily fall, and am ready to sin, vouchsafe f me grace, as oft as I shall, to rise again; let me never presume, but always most meekly and humbly acknowledge my wretchedness and frailty, and repent, with a firm purpose to amend; and let me not despair because of my great frailty, but ever trust in Thy most loving merey and readiness to forgive.”*

SECTION II.

Rule 1. Thou shalt have much to do in mortifying of thy five senses, which must be all shut up in the crucified humility of Jesus Christ, and be as they were plainly dead.

2. Thou must now learn to have a continual eye inwardly to thy soul and spiritual life, as thou hast used heretofore to have all thy mind and regard to outward pleasure and worldly things.

3. Thou must submit and give thyself up unto the discipline of Jesus, and become his scholar, resigning and compelling thyself altogether to obey him in all

things; so that thy willing and nillingⁱ thou utterly and perfectly do cast away from thee, and do nothing without his license: at every word thou wilt speak, at every morsel thou wilt eat, at every stirring or moving of every article or member of thy body, thou must ask leave of him in thy heart, and ask thyself whether, having so done, that be according to his will and holy example, and with sincere intention of his glory. Hence,

4. Even the most necessary actions of thy life, though lawful, yet must thus be offered up with a true intention unto God, in the union of the most holy works, and blessed merits of Christ; saying, *“Lord Jesus, bind up in the merits of thy blessed senses, all my feeling and sensation, and all my wits and senses, that I never hereafter use them to any sensuality!”*

5. Thus labour to come to this union and knitting up of thy senses in God and thy Lord Jesus, and remain so fast to the cross, that thou never part from it, and still behave thy body and all thy senses as in the presence of thy Lord God, and commit all things to the most trusty providence of thy loving Lord, who will then order all things delectably and sweetly for thee. Reckon all things besides for right nought; and

thus mayest thou come unto wonderful illuminations and spiritual influence from the Lord thy God.

6. If, for his love, thou canst crucify, renounce, and forsake perfectly thyself and all things, thou must so crucify thyself to all things, and love and desire God only, with thy care and whole heart, that in this most steadfast and strong knot and union unto the will of God, if He would create hell in thee here, thou mightest be ready to offer thyself, by His grace, for His eternal honour and glory to suffer it, and that purely for His will and pleasure.

7. Thou must keep thy memory clean and pure, as it were, a wedlock chamber, from all strange thoughts, fancies, and imaginations; and it must be trimmed and adorned with holy meditations and virtues of Christ's life and passion, that God may continually and ever rest therein.

A PRAYER.

8. *“Lord, instead of knowing Thee, I have sought to know wickedness and sin; and whereas my will and desire were created to love Thee, I have lost that love, and declined to the creatures. While my memory ought to be filled with Thee, I have painted it with the imagery of innumerable fancies, not*

only of all creatures, but of all sinful wickedness. Oh! blot out these by Thy blood, and imprint Thy own blessed image in my soul, blessed Jesus, by that blood that issued out from Thy most loving heart when thou hangedst on the cross. So knit my will to Thy most holy will, that S I may have no other will but Thine, and may be most heartily and fully content with whatsoever Thou wouldst do to me in this world: yea, if Thou wilt, so that I hate Thee not, nor sin against Thee, but retain Thy love, make me suffer the greatest pains.”

SECTION III.

Rule 1. Exercise thyself to the perfect abnegation of all things which may let or impede this union. Mortify in thee every thing that is not of God, nor for God, or which He willeth and loveth not. Resigning and yielding up to the high pleasure of God, all love and affection for transitory things, desire neither to have nor hold them, nor bestow or give them, but only for the pure love and honour of God. Put away superfluous and unnecessary things, and affect not even things necessary.

2. Mortify all affection to and seeking of thyself, which is so natural to men in all the good they desire,

and in all the good they do, and in all the evil they suffer: yea, by the inordinate love of the gifts and graces of God, instead of Himself, they fall into spiritual pride, gluttony, and greediness.

3. Mortify all affection to, and delectation in, meat and drink, and vain thoughts and fancies, which, though they proceed not to consent, yet defile the soul, and grieve the Holy Ghost, and do great damage to the spiritual life.

4. Imprint on thy heart the image of Jesus crucified, the impressions of his humility, poverty, mildness, and all his holy virtues; let thy thought of him turn into affection, and thy knowledge into love. For the love of God doth most purely work in the mortification of nature: the life of the spirit, purifying the higher powers of the soul, begets the solitariness and departure from all creatures, and the influence and flowing into God.

5. Solitude, silence, and the strait keeping of the heart, are the foundations and grounds of a spiritual life.

6. Do all thy necessary and outward works without any trouble or carefulness of mind, and bear thy mind

amidst all always inwardly lifted up and elevated to God, following always more the inward exercise of love, than the outward acts of virtue.

7. To this can no man come, unless he be rid and delivered from all things under God, and be so swallowed up in God, that he can contemn and despise himself, and all things; for the pure love of God maketh the Spirit pure and simple, and so free, that without any pain or labour, it can at all times turn and recollect itself in God.

8. Mortify all bitterness of heart towards thy neighbours, and all vain complacency in thyself, all vain glory and desire of esteem, in words and deeds, in gifts and graces. To this thou shalt come by a more clear and perfect knowledge and consideration of thy own vileness, and by knowing God to be the fountain of all grace and goodness.

9. Mortify all affection towards inward, sensible, spiritual delight in grace, and the following devotion with sensible sweetness in the lower faculties or powers of the soul, which are nowise real sanctity and holiness in themselves, but certain gifts of God to help our infirmity.

10. Mortify all curious investigation or search, all speculation and knowledge of unnecessary things, human or divine: for the perfect life of a Christian consisteth not in high knowledge, but profound meekness, in holy simplicity, and in the ardent love of God; wherein we ought to desire to die to all affection to ourselves and all things below God; yea, to sustain pain and dereliction, that we may be perfectly knit and united to God, and be perfectly swallowed up in Him.

11. Mortify all undue scrupulousness of conscience, and trust in the goodness of God: for our doubting and scruples oftentimes arise from inordinate self-love, and therefore vex us; they do no good, neither work any real amendment in us; they cloud the soul, and darken faith, and cool love; and it is only the stronger beams of these that can dispel them. And the stronger that faith and Divine confidence is in us, and the hotter Divine love is, the soul is so much the more excited and enabled to all the parts of holiness, to mortifications of passions and lusts, to more patience in adversity, and to more thankfulness in all estates.

12. Mortify all impatience in all pains and troubles, whether from the hands of God or men, all desire of revenge, all resentment of injuries; and by the pure

love of God, love thy very persecutors as if they were thy dearest friends.

13. Finally, Mortify thy own will in all things, with full resignation of thyself to suffer all dereliction, outward and inward, all pain, and pressures, and desolations, and that for the pure love of God: for, from self-love and self-will, spring all sin and all pain.

A PRAYER.

“O! Jesus, my Saviour, thy blessed humility! impress wit on my heart. Make me most sensible of thy infinite dignity, and of my own vileness, that I may hate myself as a thing of nought, and be willing to be despised and trodden upon by all, as the vilest mire of the streets, that I may still retain these words; I AM NOTHING, I HAVE NOTHING, I CAN DO NOTHING, AND I DESIRE NOTHING BUT ONE.”

SECTION IV.

Rule 1. Never do any thing with propriety and singular affection, being too earnest, or too much given to it; but with continual meekness of heart and mind, lie at the foot of God, and say, *“Lord, I desire*

nothing, neither in myself, nor in any creature, save only to know and execute Thy blessed will.”

Saying alway in thy heart, “ *Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? Transform my will into Thine: fill full, and swallow up as it were, my affections with Thy love, and with an insatiable desire to honour Thee, and despise myself.* ”

2. If thou aspire to attain to the perfect knitting and union with God, know that it requireth a perfect exspoliationⁱⁱ, and denudation, or bare nakedness, and utter forsaking of all sin, yea, of all creatures, and of thyself particularly: even that thy mind and understanding, thy affections and desires, thy memory and fancy, be made bare of all things in the world and all sensual pleasures in them, so as thou wouldst be content that the bread which thou eatest had no more savour than a stone, and yet, for His honour and glory that created bread, thou art pleased that it savoureth well: but yet, from the delectation thou feelest in it, turn thy heart to His praises, and love that made it.

3. The more perfectly thou livest in the abstraction, and departure, and bare nakedness of thy mind from all creatures, the more nakedly and purely shalt thou have the fruition of the Lord thy God, and shalt live the more heavenly and angelical a life. Therefore,

4. Labour above all things most exactly to forsake all for Him; and chiefly to forsake and contemn thyself; purely loving Him, and in a manner forgetting thyself and all things, for the vehement burning love of Him: thus thy mind will run so much upon Him that thou wilt take no heed what is sweet or bitter, neither wilt thou consider time or place, nor mark one person from another, for the wonder and love of thy Lord God, and the desire of his blessed will, pleasure, and honour in all things. And whatsoever good thou dost, know and think that God doth it, and not thou.

5. Choose always (to the best of thy skill) what is most to God’s honour, and most like unto Christ and his example, and most profitable to thy neighbour, and most against thy own proper will, and least serviceable to thy own praise and exaltation.

6. If thou continue faithful in this spiritual work and tra-vail, God at length, without doubt, will hear thy knocking, and will deliver thee from all thy spiritual trouble, from all the tumults, noise, and encumbrance of cogitations and fancies, and from all earthly affections, which thou canst by no better means put away, than by continual and fervent desire of the love of God.

7. Do not at any time let or hinder His working, by following thine own will; for behold how much thou dost the more perfectly forsake thine own will, and the love of thyself, and of all worldly things, so much the more deeply and safely shalt thou be knit unto God, and increase in His true and pure love.

SECTION V.

Rule 1. If thou still above all things seek that union, thou must transfundⁱⁱⁱ and pour thy whole will into the high pleasure of God; and whatsoever befalls thee, thou must be without murmuring and retraction of heart, accepting it most joyfully for His love whose will and work it is.

2. Let thy great joy and comfort evermore be, to have His pleasure done in thee, though in pains, sickness, persecutions, oppressions, or inward griefs and pressures of heart, coldness or barrenness of mind, darkening of thy will and senses, or any temptations, spiritual or bodily. And,

3. Under any of these, be always wary thou turn not to sinful delights, nor to sensual and carnal pleasures, nor set thy heart on vain things, seeking comfort thereby, nor in any wise be idle, but, always as thou

canst, compel and force thyself to some good spiritual exercise or bodily work: and though they be then unsavoury to thee, yet are they not the less, but the more acceptable to God.

4. Take all afflictions as tokens of God's love to thee, and trials of thy love to Him, and purposes of kindness to enrich thee, and increase more plentifully in thee His blessed gifts and spiritual graces, if thou persevere faithfully unto the end, not leaving off the vehement desire of His love and thy own perfection.

5. Offer up thyself wholly to Him, and fix the point of thy love upon His most blessed uncreated love; and there let thy soul and heart rest and delight, and be as it were resolved and melted most happily into the blessed Godhead; and then take that as a token, and be assured by it, that God will grant thy lovely and holy desire. Then shalt thou feel in a manner no difference betwixt honour and shame, joy and sorrow; but whatsoever thou perceivest to appertain to the honour of thy Lord, be it ever so hard and unpleasant to thyself, thou wilt heartily embrace it, yea, with all thy might follow and desire it: yet, when thou wilt think thou hast done what is possible for thee, thou wilt think thou hast done nothing at all,

yea, thou shalt be ashamed, and detest thyself, that thou hast so wretchedly and imperfectly served so noble and worthy a Lord; and therefore, thou wilt desire and endeavour every hour to do and suffer greater and more perfect things than hitherto thou hast done, forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forward to those that are before.

6. If thou hast in any measure attained to love and abide in God, then mayest thou keep the power of thy soul and thy senses, as it were, shut up in God, from gadding out to any worldly thing or vanity, as much as possible, where they have so joyfully a security and safeness. Satiating thy soul in Him, and in all other things still see His blessed presence.

7. Whatsoever befalleth thee, receive it not from the hand of any creature, but from Him alone, and render back all to Him, seeking in all things His pleasure and honour, the purifying and subduing of thyself. What can harm thee, when all must first touch God, within whom thou hast enclosed thyself?

8. When thou perceivest thyself thus knit to God, and thy soul more fast and joined nearer to Him than to thine own body, then shalt thou know His everlasting, and incomprehensible, and ineffable

goodness, and the true nobleness of thy soul, that came from Him, and was made to be reunited to Him.

9. If thou wouldst ascend and come up to thy Lord God, thou must climb up by the wounds of His blessed humanity, that remain as it were for that use; and when thou art got up there, thou wouldst rather suffer death than willingly commit any sin.

10. Entering into Jesus, thou castest thyself into an infinite Sea of Goodness, that more easily drowns and happily swallows thee up, than the ocean does a drop of water. Then shalt thou be hid and transformed in Him, and shalt often be as thinking without thought, and knowing without knowledge, and loving without love, comprehended of Him whom thou canst not comprehend.

SECTION VI.

Rule 1. Too much desire to please men, mightily prejudgeth^{iv} the pleasing of God.

2. Too great earnestness and vehemency, and too greedy delight in bodily work and external doings scattereth and loseth the tranquillity and calmness of the mind.

3. Cast all thy care on God, and commit all to His good pleasure: laud, and praise, and applaud Him in all things, small and great. Forsake thy own will, and deliver up thyself freely and cheerfully to the will of God, without reserve or exception, in prosperity and adversity, sweet or sour, to have or to want, to live or to die.

4. Disunite thy heart from all things, and unite it only to God.

5. Remember often and devoutly, the life and passion, the death and resurrection, of our Saviour Jesus.

6. Descant not on other men's deeds, but consider thine own: forget other men's faults, and remember thine own.

7. Never think highly of thyself, nor despise any other man.

8. Keep silence and retirement as much as thou canst, and through God's grace, they will keep thee from snares and offences.

9. Lift up thy heart often to God, and desire in all things His assistance.

10. Let thy heart be filled and wholly taken up with the love of God, and of thy neighbour; and do all that thou dost, in that sincere charity and love.

The sum is:

1. Remember always the presence of God.
2. Rejoice always in the will of God. And,
3. Direct all to the glory of God.

SECTION VII.

1. Little love, little trust; but a great love brings a great confidence.

2. That is a blessed hope that doth not slacken us in our duty, nor maketh us secure, but increaseth both a cheerful will, and gives greater strength to mortification and all obedience.

3. What needest thou, or why travailest thou about so many things? Think upon one, desire and love one, and thou shalt find great rest. Therefore,

4. Wherever thou be, let this voice of God be still in thine ear: My son, return inwardly to thy heart, abstract thyself from all things, and mind Me only. Thus,

5. With a pure mind in God, clean and bare from the memory of all things, remaining unmoveably in Him, thou shalt think and desire nothing but Him alone; as though there were nothing else in the world but He and thou only together; that all thy faculties and powers being thus recollected into God, thou mayest become one spirit with Him.

6. Fix thy mind on thy crucified Saviour, and remember continually His great meekness, love, and obedience, His pure chastity, His unspeakable patience, and all the holy virtues of His humanity.

7. Think on His mighty power and infinite goodness; how He created and redeemed thee; how he justifieth thee, and worketh in thee all virtues, graces, and goodness: and thus remember Him, until thy memory turn into love and affection. Therefore,

8. Draw thy mind thus from all creatures, unto a certain silence and rest from the jangling and

company of all things below God; and when thou canst come to this, then is thy heart a place meet and ready for thy Lord God to abide in, there to talk with thy soul.

9. True humility gaineth and overcometh God Almighty, and maketh thee all apt and meet to receive all graces and gifts. But alas! who can say that he hath this blessed meekness, it being so hard, so uncertain, so seeret and unknown a thing, to forsake and mortify perfectly and exactly thyself, and that most venomous worm of all goodness, vain-glory?

10. Commit all to the high providence of God, and suffer nothing to rest or enter into thy heart, save only God. All things in the earth are too base to take up thy love or care, or to trouble thy noble heart, thy immortal and heavenly mind. Let them care and sorrow, or rejoice about these things, who are of the world, for whom Christ would not pray.

11. Thou canst not please nor serve two masters at once; thou canst not love divers and contrary things; if, then, thou wouldst know what thou lovest, mark well what thou thinkest most upon. Leave Earth, and have Heaven; leave the world, and have God.

12. All sin and vice springeth from the property of our own will: all virtue and perfection cometh and growth from the mortifying of it, and the resigning of it wholly to the pleasure and will of God.

THE END.

ⁱ *nilling - unwilling.*

ⁱⁱ *exspoliation - the act of spoiling, of plundering; intentional destruction.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *transfund - to pour liquid from one vessel into another.*

^{iv} *prejudgeth - takes away from.*