

Experiencing the Depth of Jesus Christ: The Autobiography Study Guide

**Experiencing the Depth of Jesus Christ: The
Autobiography by Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte
Guyon**

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Plot Summary

Jeanne Guyon begins by saying that some people believe they can never be truly close to Jesus Christ and she says that simply isn't true. She says that it begins with a yielding of the heart and that anyone with a heart can accomplish this. She also says this kind of relationship must be centered on prayer, but that a prayer from the mind is not adequate because selfish desires and distractions will interrupt prayer that comes only from the mind. Guyon goes on to say that a closer walk with Jesus Christ does impact selfish desires in that those desires no longer have the importance they once had if you are truly walking with Him.

Guyon explains that the person who diligently seeks out a full prayer life will eventually lose himself in that prayer life. She warns that this takes a person willing to turn himself inward from selfish desires, and that this inward turning will be repeated time and again, as the human nature is to turn away. She warns that it takes time to create a strong foundation of this practice and warns that it cannot become a ritual. She also warns that an hour or two each day is not sufficient, but that it must become a condition that is continual.

Guyon describes several methods used along the way to this point, but repeatedly points out that all involve being still and listening. Some people have to find a quiet place away from distractions.

Guyon says that reading a practical, simple scripture is one effective way to begin the process. She says that it's vital to remember that the ultimate goal is not study, but to find the inner sense of the meaning, allowing God to send this understanding. At the highest level of turning inward is what Guyon refers to as "Divine Union." She says this is a point at which the person is completely at one with God.

Guyon's book was not originally intended for general circulation but was written in the 1600s as a guide for a few of her friends who sought a deeper relationship with the Lord. The book was eventually used to have Guyon arrested, though she was later hailed as one of the most influential women of the church and an important woman in the history of France. The final chapter of the book is written by Guyon in prison as she offers advice to a woman who had written to her. In that passage, she reminds the reader to take nourishment from the Lord "as often as you can."



Chapters 1 through 5

Chapters 1 through 5 Summary and Analysis

Jeanne Guyon begins by saying that some people believe they can never be truly close to Jesus Christ and she says that simply isn't true. She says that it begins with a yielding of the heart and that anyone with a heart can accomplish this. She also says this kind of relationship must be centered around prayer, but that a prayer from the mind is not adequate because selfish desires and distractions will interrupt prayer that comes only from the mind. Guyon goes on to say that a closer walk with Jesus Christ does impact selfish desires in that those desires no longer have the importance they once had if you are truly walking with Him.

The key to finding this kind of prayer life is to seek God, and Guyon indicates that prayer from the heart will naturally follow. This prayer life, found so simply if one knows the way, is necessary but is so easily attained that a person who knows the key will not neglect their prayer time with the Lord. She then turns her attention to two ways a beginner could come to Christ.

The two options for coming to Christ, according to Guyon, are "praying the Scripture" and "beholding the Lord," which she also refers to as "waiting in His presence." The first requires that you choose a passage of scripture for careful consideration. The passage should be simple and practical and the reader humble and quiet. Read slowly. The objective is not to move on to something else, but to sense the full meaning of the Scripture. Guyon makes the point that there is a time for study, but that time is different. Guyon suggests that you use the portions of the Scripture that speak to you for your prayer time. She predicts that carefully following this course of study will create a "rich" prayer life.

The second kind of prayer, described as "beholding the Lord" or "waiting on the Lord" also requires the Scriptures. It's here that Guyon warns that the natural tendency is to move from the Lord and says using the Scripture to quiet the mind is a way to overcome this tendency. In this second kind of prayer, one should read a passage of Scripture, using that passage as a way to quiet the mind and allow you to stand in the presence of the Lord.

Guyon quotes St. Augustine who says that he wasted time during his early days of Christianity in trying to find the Lord outwardly. Guyon says you must turn inward, and continues to warn against allowing the mind to wander. She says that once the mind is turned inwardly, you will simply find God waiting. Once in this situation, the mind "becomes occupied" with the Scripture that was read as well as the presence of Jesus Christ. She indicates that it's not any specific thought that's important at this point, but that you "feed" on the Scripture. To explain the next step, Guyon points out that food is of no use to the body unless it's swallowed. She says the same is true of this situation and that you must allow it to happen.



Guyon talks again about the need to make sure your mind doesn't wander during these times, then turns to some additional points she wants to make. One is that you should be willing to remain in a specific place as long as you sense the Lord there. Another is that this turning inward requires practice, and that a gracious Lord will help you achieve what you seek. She completes this section by reminding the reader that the Lord wants to reveal Himself to you and that opening to this grace will draw you closer to Him.

Guyon next addresses an entire chapter to those who cannot read. A footnote indicates that the chapter is helpful to the literate though it is most effective for reading to those who cannot read for themselves - a situation that was common at the time of the writing. Guyon quotes Luke 17:21, saying that "the kingdom of God is within you." She says that when you realize that as fact, the only requirement is to "come to the Lord." Guyon focuses on the attitude of the person seeking the Lord, saying that you must come quietly, humbly, confessing that He is everything and you are nothing, closing your eyes, avoiding distractions and looking only inward. Then she says that the only belief that can bring a person to the point of desired closeness with Jesus is the "belief that God dwells in you." Once you've come to the desired place, all that's required is that you "be still."

Guyon urges the use of the Lord's Prayer in this case. She says to begin praying, though the prayer may be interrupted from time to time as you sit still, listen, confess and praise. She says you will know when those times come, especially the time when you should quietly listen.

Guyon explains that the phrase of the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done," refers to God's will that all His children love him. She says that this means that you are actually praying that God will "allow you to love Him," and that the only thing for you to do is to love Him. You should also pray for God's love in return, according to Guyon. Guyon says that there's no need for ritual or memorization, and that you might also come to him seeking "real food," which is also acceptable and may be accomplished with a prayer of your own. She says that it's a waste of time to try to figure out what God might do or what He is like, and that belief in His presence is all that's required.

Guyon says there is a "second level of prayers" that may be used equally by both the educated and uneducated. She calls this a "prayer of simplicity" though she says others refer to it as "faith and stillness."

Guyon says that once you have come to a point of a regular prayer life, it's time to set off on a new path. She warns that, just as it took time to gain a comfort level with the previous methods, this too will take time and that there will be times of disappointment. She likens the relationship between you and God as "a fire within." She said that, just like a fire, this will "ebb and flow," sometimes burning more brightly. When the fire begins to grow faint, you must fan it gently. That means that the moment you feel God's presence lessening, you must call to Him, or offer words of love or joy. Once the Presence is fully before you again, you must be quiet and listen. As with a fire, Guyon warns that "fanning the flames" too much can extinguish the blaze. The most important



aspect of this prayer life, according to Guyon, is to remain with the Lord and to do so with a believing heart.

Guyon concludes the chapter by questioning the reason you come to seek this relationship with God. She likens this to a servant who only serves a master to get a reward. She says that this servant is worth little consideration. Instead of seeking something - even enjoyment in the presence of the Lord - come willing only to please Him. Guyon says a willing heart isn't seeking gifts, favors or even His presence.

Guyon warns that there will be occasional "dry spells" in which you cannot seem to find the presence of the Lord. She says God does this to keep you from a ritual that is lazy. She says dry spells are a fact of Christian life and that the more important question is what to do when those times occur. Guyon says that exerting yourself isn't the answer, but that patience is. She urges you to pour out your love, but to do so patiently with the intention of waiting for the Lord's return. She says the person who do so will be rewarded with "abundant goodness and tender caresses of love." Guyon says that your faithfulness in continuing to wait for Him will prove to the Lord that you aren't returning to Him merely for the wonderful experience you have during the encounter.

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The book begins with a letter from Jeanne Guyon, explaining that the book had never meant to be published for the general public. She says that she'd intended it to be used by a few close friends who had the desire to be closer to Jesus Christ and that she was seeking to help them attain that goal. In fact, the work has become a highly respected spiritual guide and Guyon herself is counted among the most influential women of the church. For a period of time, it was burned publicly in France.

Guyon says that in choosing a passage of Scripture for the "praying the Scripture" option of enhancing your prayer life, a person should choose something practical and simple. She doesn't explain why, but it seems likely that this is so that you don't have to be overly concerned with the surface meaning of that scripture. She says that distraction is one of the things that can potentially interfere with prayer life, and it seems that the motivation here is to eliminate at least that distraction.

Guyon continually urges that to come to the Lord requires that you come "quietly." She never fully explains what is meant by this term, but it seems possible that she is referring to a state of mind, and that one who is quiet - or humble, perhaps - will have a better sense of the Lord. This could also be a reference to the need to listen rather than talk which is a requirement for Guyon's methods of creating a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

A footnote at the beginning of Chapter Four indicates that this section is intended for use by those who have a "good foundation" as described in the first three chapters. It's also noted that this foundation takes time to fully achieve.



Chapters 6 through 10

Chapters 6 through 10 Summary and Analysis

Guyon introduces a new word - "abandonment" - as part of her instruction on the next step. She says that putting aside a couple of times each day for dedicated prayer is merely a first step and that the next is a change in attitude that will impact your entire life. Guyon says that you should realize that the "glorious" prayer times and those dry spells are what God wants for you, and that you should realize that everything else in your life is also what God wants for you. Guyon says this understanding will bring a contentment.

Guyon asks you to consider whether you really want to give your life to the Lord, reminding you that gifts can be recalled. She says that only those who are able and willing to give themselves over fully forever are of any value. She then warns that it's human nature to fight against such submission, but says that God will provide the grace to remain strong in your commitment.

Guyon then defines abandonment as being the giving up of all needs - including spiritual needs. She quotes scriptures from Matthew, Psalms and Proverbs indicating that God will provide for needs, and presents the idea that this includes spiritual needs. Guyon says that putting this into practice begins by putting aside personal desires, plunging them instead into the will of the Lord. That action will meld your desires with that of the Lord.

Guyon warns against blaming man for specific circumstances, saying that all things come from the Lord with the exception of "your own sinfulness." She says that your abandonment must go one step farther so that you not only abandon your personal desires but also abandon your reactions. Guyon ends the chapter by urging that you surrender to Him, right now.

Guyon says that the "Lord Jesus loved His Father on Mt. Tabor where He was transfigured, but He loved Him no less on Calvary where He was crucified." She makes the point that a Christian must also be willing to love through hardships. She goes on to warn that those who gave themselves to Him during a good time must be willing to remain fast through the difficult times that will surely come, and that you can't expect comfort to come from man. She concludes by reminding that the Lord accepted the cross and that you must do so also. Guyon says it's natural that you will sometimes be strong in your acceptance and other times will be weak, but that you must accept, even the bad.

The next topic is godliness and Guyon warns that it must come from within in order to be lasting and true. She says that godliness will come to the person who truly abandons himself to the Lord. Guyon says that a person truly committed on this level will be willing to give up himself, more so than the Lord requires.



Guyon quote St. Augustine who wrote, "Love, then do what you please," as she makes the point that in loving the Lord, you will want to please only Him. She says that anyone who follows this path of prayer and abandonment can achieve a close relationship with the Lord, and that if all would do so, the entire church would be reformed.

Guyon says that many people want to overcome their own selfish desires, but warns that self-denial is not the answer to accomplishing this because you can never fully overcome your senses and that in focusing on overcoming the senses, you are actually paying more attention to them, making it more difficult to overcome. She says that's not to say there's no hope, but only that self-denial is not the answer.

Instead, Guyon says the way to "conquer" the senses is to turn completely inward toward the Lord, severing the attention to the senses. The "faithful" in this endeavor will find the God takes care of the longings of the flesh and the only requirement of you is to remain faithful in giving the Lord your attention. Guyon warns that your imagination will still be active and this is where self-discipline comes in. She concludes the subject by saying that the person who follows this method will draw closer to God and so will have a greater sense of the Lord's power, and will naturally be far removed from the sins that compel interest.

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Guyon says that a person giving themselves over to Jesus Christ is like any other gift - the giver can't take it back. She then indicates that a person who gives themselves to God and then accepts that all aspects of life are what He has in mind for them will find a level of contentment not attained by anyone living outside this commitment. While she doesn't dwell on this aspect, she indicates that this really means that a person will be able to accept that this is what God has in mind, and that they aren't at the mercy of their fellow man.

Guyon warns that a Christian must realize that the Lord and the cross go together and cannot be separated. She uses the cross as a symbol that times won't always be pleasant. She will go into great detail about how to handle these difficult times that are sure to arrive at your doorstep, including an assurance that you will be strong enough to handle anything that comes. While she doesn't specifically say so, it seems that this is her way of making the reader understand that suffering for the sake of belief in the Lord is to be welcomed as a part of the Christian life.

Guyon presents the idea that "the Lord is very jealous over any saint who is utterly abandoned to Him." She goes on to say that God doesn't allow that person any pleasures outside God. She doesn't elaborate but then simply moves on to another thought related to godliness. It seems that she's presented an idea that may be confusing for some young Christians who aren't ready to give up themselves or don't yet understand that this "contentment" she describes.



Chapters 11 through 20

Chapters 11 through 20 Summary and Analysis

Guyon next introduces a concept she calls the "law of central tendency." She explains that a person who pulls himself inward will find himself drawn farther inward by the magnetism of God. She likens it to the vapor from the ocean that is purified in the sky, saying that there's nothing required in order to achieve this purified state. She warns that you are not to do anything except pull yourself inward toward a closer relationship with the Lord and allow Him to do the rest. Though it may be difficult at first, it will soon become habit and the human tendencies toward self will be overcome.

Guyon next addresses the fact that passivity requires a strong will. She notes that it's human nature to want to "exert" yourself, but that the only thing you really have to do is overcome the natural tendency to hold onto self-control. She concludes this thought by saying that you are required to do so "faithfully," meaning regularly, and that you'll find that your entire being is in God's control. She warns not to let this seem a time of "barren" inactivity, because the truth is that the heart becomes still because of the abundance of Christ.

Guyon uses the illustration of a baby nursing. The baby prompts the milk to flow by "moving its lips," but then has to do nothing but take in the nourishment. Guyon says this relationship with the Lord is the same - you may prompt it by moving your lips in prayer, but then should sit quietly and take in the flowing nourishment. Like a baby who has nursed its fill, a peaceful or "mystical" sleep may follow. Guyon says it's beyond this point that you find another place where you can experience "continual prayer." She concludes the thought by saying that this path requires nothing of you and that the best of God is the easiest to reach.

Once you have reached the point of continual prayer, it's impossible to differentiate between prayer and the Lord's presence. Guyon likens that to an "internal conversation" with God and says nothing is required of you except that you remain faithful. Guyon concludes this lesson by saying that an hour or two each day is not sufficient, but that it must be a continual habit.

On the subject of confession, Guyon says that the most effective method is to open yourself to God and allow him to show you areas of sin rather than trying to figure them out for yourself because it's human nature to ignore sin in yourself. She explains that you will come to a point at which God immediately shows you even the smallest of sins and that you have to accept the reproof for that sin.

Guyon says that it's natural to expect a "sorrowful" attitude when confessing sin, but said there's a level at which the Lord will bestow his love at your confession. She warns that trying to "produce a contrite heart" through your own endeavors only takes away from true repentance. She says that there will come a point at which you simply hate sin



as God hates sin, and warns again against the inclination to find - and take - action on your own rather than allowing God to have His way in all aspects of life. She concludes the thought by warning that this instruction isn't for anyone who continues to seek the Lord with an "active" soul.

Guyon next presents the idea that you should never force yourself to speak but should yield to the drawing of the Lord. She concludes this thought by warning against using rituals as worship, saying that you must be willing to follow the Lord's lead and instruction. She next briefly touches on the subject of requests in prayers, saying that you must be willing to "give up your own prayers," allowing the Lord to pray instead. She says that requires that you be attached to nothing.

Guyon next addressed distractions and temptations. She warns against becoming bogged down in your own faults and failures. She says that when your mind wanders, don't waste time being distressed because of your faults but simply turn back to Him. On the subject of temptation, she compares temptation to something that frightens a child. She says that child doesn't stand there trying to figure out that thing that frightens him, but simply runs to the waiting arms of his mother. She says you should treat temptation the same, running immediately to the waiting arms of God. She says you may also avoid temptation by remaining close to God, and quotes Exodus in which it's said that God will fight for you.

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Guyon says there may be some obstacles in the quest for fully drawing inward. She says that a person must remain "passive and peaceful" in order to be drawn toward God. One hindrance is that your soul is a "mixture" of the pure and impure, and God doesn't draw the impurities. This seems to mean that a person who stops to think about what he or she is giving up, may not want to draw away from those selfish pleasures and desires. She goes on to say that all you really have to do is be willing to drop those impurities to find out that they were really burdens you were carrying around. You may find that God literally takes them from you, but you have to be passive enough to allow it to happen.

Guyon says that in giving yourself to God, there are two options - all or nothing. She says that totally giving yourself over to the Lord allows Him to live in you and that this is the next step of a good prayer life and it means that "God possesses you." It also means that you possess God, His kingdom and His joy.



Chapters 21 through 25

Chapters 21 through 25 Summary and Analysis

Guyon writes at length about the workings of the soul, spirit and self, and the need to separate yourself from the selfish desires and wants. She says that it's important to remember that God makes all things possible, including the ability to turn inwardly and to achieve this relationship. She explains the relationship between the soul and Spirit by using the vision of Ezekiel and the wheel. She says that the soul is like the wheel in that it can move forward actively or can passively wait. When something stirs the soul, it "becomes like those wheels, following the Spirit wherever it goes." Guyon cautions that the soul should wait for the Spirit. Setting that soul toward the Spirit makes the "inward attraction of the Lord's spirit" powerful. Guyon admonishes that you must remember that this happens when you are at peace.

Guyon then makes the point that the "prayer of silence" necessarily prompts activity. She says that once the Spirit is in tune with God, activity follows. She says that just as the church is active, so must its members be. She does remind you that activity must be driven by the Spirit rather than of the self. She says you must remember that the activity prompted by the "Spirit must take the place of your own," and reminds you that you must consent and agree to this situation, and must willingly give up your own activities. Guyon illustrates this with the story of Martha and Mary. Martha was busy while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Jesus told Martha that she wasn't listening to the depths of what she should do in order to draw closer to Him.

Guyon says that you must be willing to become one with Him - Jesus Christ - and that one of the benefits is that people don't know what they need, but that the Lord does. She says that you must give the Spirit free reign with the understanding that His prayers are always heard. This intercession has one purpose - to make you perfect in keeping with God's will. Guyon concludes with a thought: If this is the case, you have no real cause for worry. With this understanding, Guyon says that there is no need for anyone to hold back from giving himself fully to God's calling.

Guyon next turns to the topic of inward activities as opposed to outward actions. She says that outward actions can never draw you closer to the Lord but that these outward actions are sometimes the result of internal conditions. She reminds you that the good from these outward activities are in keeping with what prompts them.

Guyon reassures you that you may find yourself continually straying and that all you have to do is to continually turn back to Him until you find that you "continuously" abide there. She then explains the ability to be active while resting, saying that the activity is the "sweet sinking into Deity." She says that Christians on a deeper level of understanding may not realize they are active at all.



Guyon says that the outward experiences with the Lord are necessary for the young Christian and that they play a role in growth. She warns that some want to hold to that comfortable experience but that it's not possible since you must grow. She says that it would be foolish to stop the growing process, though it is sometimes hard work.

Guyon next turns her attention to the act of leading others to the Lord. She says that instead of presenting a list of rules, the new Christian should be taught to pray and to turn inward. She says that God requires the heart "above all else," and that should be the foundation of the Christian disciple. She warns that those who are left with the responsibility of bringing the youngsters to the Lord will someday have to account for what they did - or did not - do, and for their own actions, including whether they turned inwardly to the Lord. Guyon also warns against getting caught up in doctrine, saying one who argues doctrine cannot be brought closer to the Lord. She also warns against the idea that some are too simple to learn to walk with the Lord, saying that that Lord loves a simple way and that the uneducated are often humbler and more qualified to walk with Him.

Guyon says that ultimate goal of a Christian should be "Divine Union." She quotes a verse from Exodus that indicates that a man cannot see God and live, to make the point that a prayer that continues to come from man - rather than from the Spirit - is not going to reach God. Guyon likens the wisdom of God to the fire used to purify gold. She says this wisdom takes away the selfish will in order that God may reign completely. She warns that this doesn't mean there won't be imperfections, but says that "God deliberately" leaves defects even in his greatest saints "so He can preserve that saint from corruption."

The book ends with an excerpt from a letter written by Guyon during her imprisonment in St. Antoine, France, in reply to a woman who had read the book and had some practical questions. She advises that the woman practice patience, interject her silent prayers with verbal pleadings to the Lord, and learn to become "a little one" with an eye toward leaving selfish desires behind. She completes her advice by saying that the woman should "take the Lord's Supper as often as you can," and with the prayer that the Lord will "set up His kingdom in your heart."

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Guyon quotes a passage from the Song of Solomon in which the singer calls to the Lord to "draw me," promising that "we will run after you." Guyon explains this as a way of making her point about the separation of Spirit, soul and senses. She says that the "me" is the Spirit and it's in this very center part of your being where God is. The "we" that will follow includes the soul and senses. It seems that Guyon is attempting to help the reader more aware that the senses are at the heart of the selfishness but that they will eventually be swayed into the habit of this new lifestyle, given the proper motivation. In other words, if the Spirit is drawn to the Lord, the senses will follow.

Guyon says briefly that there are those who get overly caught up in doctrine. She specifically says, "Right now Christian leaders are quite preoccupied with the fear that



the Lord's people will fall into some doctrinal error." Considering that Guyon wrote this book in the 1600s, it's interesting that the same fact could be said today. There are many "religions" and many "Christians" who are ready to fight over doctrinal issues. There seems to be little tolerance in many cases and, based on Guyon's ideas as presented, all these arguments accomplish is to distract a person from the ultimate goal of a life walked in close union with the Lord.

Guyon talks of a goldsmith who uses fire to purge impurities from gold. She says that the same thing happens to you as God accepts you, using this "fire" to purge carnal, selfish and sensual thoughts. It may seem that no one would go into this process willingly and Guyon warns that no one is adequately motivated to go, which is why God Himself has that authority and power. She goes on to talk about the enthusiasm of a new Christian. At that moment, a new convert may say that he is willing to do whatever God has in mind, but when the moment of "purging" arrives, it's somewhat disappointing. Again, Guyon points to the goldsmith who puts the gold in the fire and watches it melt into a black mess. She says that the new Christian doesn't have the foresight to see the good that will eventually be revealed, though God - like the goldsmith - can foresee the outcome. Guyon warns that the process is ongoing and takes a long time.

The Epilogue explains that Guyon's writings upset a number of people, eventually prompting her death. It's said that God used this book to "stir believers all over France" and that it was eventually used to prove that he was a heretic. After her death, the book influenced many - Quakers, John Wesley and Jesse Penn-Lewis, to name a few. The amazing part of that story is that the original version is very confusing, even when translated into English. A paragraph is included to prove the point and it's explained that this version of the book has been simplified greatly from the original. The epilogue goes on to comment on the current condition of the church, saying that the current age rivals that of Guyon's life for lack of spiritual depth and that most are blind to that fact. This section goes on to make several additional points and pleas, including that the book deserves better than to be used as a series of prayers or sermons, but should occupy "a great deal of your time." As the epilogue is not written by Guyon but by the current publishers, it's up to the reader to determine the weight to place on this section of the book.



Characters

Jeanne Guyon

A spiritual woman and the author of the book, she has been called one of the most influential women of the church and played an important role in the history of France. Guyon has some specific thoughts on Christianity, prayer, and a daily walk with Jesus Christ. She wrote this book to serve as a guide for a few close friends who wanted to achieve that same level of commitment.

Guyon continually says that it's easy to reach a deep level of understanding in the Christian life. She says that it takes a willingness to turn inwardly again and again. She warns against distractions and against becoming distressed at any of the situations or circumstances, saying that it's necessary to accept everything as having come from the Lord.

Guyon's writing is eventually used against her, prompting her arrest and imprisonment in France. Her writing is publicly burned in Dijon, France, in the 1700s. It's important for the reader to realize that the words are not Guyon's own, but are a rewritten version with the current publishers saying that the original writing of Guyon was convoluted and difficult to comprehend.

You

The person addressed by the author. The entire work is directed to "you," which gives the book a very personal air. The "you" in the book was actually a few friends with whom Guyon wanted to share her thoughts on Christ, prayer, and other aspects of the Christian life. Guyon indicates at the opening of the book that she had never intended it to be for publication, but that she offered it up as such. As "you" read, you will find that there are very personal plans set out with an ultimate goal—to create a close, lasting union with God.

Toward that end, Guyon offers insight that seems to be of a person nature. She warns that this path is not easy and that there will be many distractions along the way. She says that you will have to turn inward again and again, and warns against becoming discouraged in this endeavor. She tells "you" that you must not get caught up in doctrine or worry whether you are sufficiently educated. She also tells "you" that you will be held accountable for your deeds, ultimately including whether you sought out this prayer life and whether you taught others to do so as well.

God

Also referred to in these passages as the Lord or Jesus Christ. It's a closer relationship with God that is, according to Guyon, the ultimate goal of a careful, dedicated prayer



life. Guyon does not go into depth about God nor of His role in anything other than the life of a believer. Guyon says that it's important to remember that it's to God that you "abandon" yourself.

St. Augustine

A saint canonized by the Catholic church, history indicates that he was a bishop and noted theologian. Guyon quotes him on several occasions and seems to rely on his words and insights. One of those quotes indicates that St. Augustine wasted time during his early days as a Christian seeking the outward experiences with the Lord.

A Beginner in Christ

A person Guyon addresses as requiring instruction related to prayer and to addressing Christ. Guyon explains that this person really has two options for creating a positive prayer life. She calls one "reading and praying the Scripture" and the second "beholding the Lord."

The Uneducated

Guyon dedicates an entire chapter to the person who cannot read—the uneducated. It should be noted that literacy was the exception at the time of this writing and that Guyon intended that this chapter be read aloud to those who could not read for themselves.

Those Caught Up in Doctrine

These are the people who argue that some are falling into the trap of religions that teach incorrect doctrine. Guyon warns these people that they are worrying about something that is only serving to distract them from what should be their real purpose in life—a close prayerful relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul

One of the disciples of Jesus Christ and the person credited with writing several books of the Bible. Guyon quotes Paul on several occasions, calling on scriptures from his writings to make points. On the very first page, she quotes from Thessalonians in which Paul exhorts the believer to "pray without ceasing." She later says that Paul did not spend time wondering about the sufferings of Jesus, but that he had Jesus imprinted on him.



Martha

According to the biblical account, Martha was a woman who, when Jesus came to her home, sat with him rather than helping prepare the meal for Him and the other guests. Guyon uses the story as an example of a person who was seeking out the best of Jesus. She was sitting quietly, taking in the time with him rather than busying herself with things that were ultimately unimportant.

Ezekiel

Biblically, Ezekiel saw a wheel in the air and the vision is used by Guyon to describe the relationship between the soul and the Spirit. Guyon says the soul is like the wheel in that it can move or remain still, but something else must drive it. That something, according to Guyon, is the Spirit.



Objects/Places

Inwardly

The direction a person should turn in order to fully connect with the Lord, especially during prayer time in order to create a full sense of Him.

The Lord's Presence

A place sought by Christians. Guyon offers ways to place oneself in that position more readily, though she says it's a human tendency to turn away from this place.

Mt. Calvary

Where Jesus was crucified. Guyon cautions that a Christian must be willing to be on Mt. Calvary as well as on Mt. Tabor.

Mt. Tabor

Where Jesus was "transfigured." Guyon warns that a Christian must be willing to remain faithful, even when times are bad.

The Law of Central Tendency

A principle introduced by Guyon that says anyone who moves inwardly will be drawn farther in by God.

Divine Union

A completion of the Christian faith, prayer, and walk in which the self gives way to the Spirit of God. Guyon calls this the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

St. Antoine, France

Where Jeanne Guyon is imprisoned.

France

Where Jeanne Guyon's book was first circulated.



Dijon, France

Where priests gathered up some three hundred copies of this book in the 1700s and burned them.

Bastille

Where Guyon was eventually imprisoned.



Themes

The Quest for the Ultimate Goal

Guyon says that she has written the book for friends who seek a closer relationship with God. She spends the book offering ways of achieving this. Those methods include some specific advice, including that you must be willing to continually turn inward because it's only at the very center of your being that you will find the Lord. Guyon says this isn't as difficult as it seems because God is like a magnet, pulling you inward farther once you have turned in that direction.

Guyon also explains that abandonment is required and says that it's human nature to be reluctant to abandon the self in favor of God. She says that, with the realization of the rewards of this relationship, it's easy to give up the self in favor of this deeper ideal.

Guyon says there are several steps or phases of growth toward the ultimate goal. She warns that it's not a short-term process and that each phase must be completed to create a firm foundation for the next. The ultimate goal is that of reaching what Guyon calls a "Divine Union."

The Necessity of Stillness

Guyon uses the word "stillness" to mean quietly. She uses these words to indicate the need for a Christian to listen, and says that this can only be accomplished by sitting still, avoiding distractions and remaining passive. Guyon talks at length about the need to remain still and says that some people may have trouble avoiding distractions. Toward that end, some may need to find a quiet place where the selfish needs and wants cannot occur.

Guyon goes on to explain that the result of this stillness, or state of listening, is the eventual sense of the deeper meanings of the Scriptures and of the Lord. This should not be confused with a time of study, according to Guyon, though that time should also be set aside. Ultimately, this stillness should lead to a state of continual prayer that will result in the ultimate goal of Divine Union.

Guyon warns that this passivity is not the same as inactivity, and says that the Christian should be drinking in the nourishment of the Lord while in prayer.

Faith

While Guyon doesn't dwell on faith as such, she points out the need for faith and the need to build faith. At one point, she says that you must come to believe that God will never let you down, and will never mislead you. The one exception to this statement, according to Guyon, is that God may bless you more than you expect.



Guyon writes of the need to give up self in favor of a deeper relationship with God, but says that it's human nature to hold onto self. She then says that anyone who realizes the deep rewards of this purging of self would do so willingly. She also talks of the need to continually turn from distractions and temptations, drawing inward toward the Lord. While she doesn't address it specifically, she indicates indirectly that faith in the end result is necessary in order to continually make these changes. For example, a person who disbelieves in the eventual closeness with God would not bother to take the steps Guyon calls necessary as a means toward the ultimate goal of Divine Union.

Style

Perspective

The book is written entirely from Jeanne Guyon's perspective with the exception of the Epilogue which is written by the publishers of this version and is meant not to extend on her work but to offer some additional information and explanation. The first person perspective is personalized by Guyon's writing style which is aimed at the reader. She frequently uses the word "you," and this adds a personal touch that some readers may appreciate.

The first person and personal perspective is the only possible option, especially considering that the book was first written directly to friends. The information presented by Guyon is her way of communicating her own methods of reaching a deeper relationship with the Lord. With this as the goal of the story, first person is the only viable presentation available to Guyon.

Tone

The book, in the version published by SeedSowers, is easy to read but it should be noted that this is an adaptation of the original version of Guyon's book. That version, according to the publishers, is not easy to read or understand. This convoluted version was still widely popular and prompted both the imprisonment of Guyon and a public burning of copies gathered in France in the 1700s.

There is a significant repetition in the book. For example, Guyon repeatedly says that turning inward is vital to the eventual uniting with the Lord. Guyon also preaches patience and tenacity, saying that it's necessary to be willing to wait and to continue to turn inwardly as many times as is necessary.

Structure

The book is written in a series of twenty-five chapters. Each is numbered and is titled, with the names of the chapters indicating the contents of that chapter. The chapters are titled "From the Shallows to the Depths," "Launching Out," "The Depths—Even for the Unlearned," "The Second Level," "Periods of Dryness," "Abandonment," "Abandonment and Suffering," "Abandonment and Revelation," "Abandonment and a Holy Life," "Living Indoors," "Toward the Center," "Continual Prayer," "Abundance," "Silence," "A New Look at Confession of Sin," "The Scripture," "Prayer Requests," "Distractions," "Temptation," "Consumed," "Silence—In the Depths," "The Constant State," "To Christian Workers," "The Ultimate Christian Attainment," and "From Prison." The final chapter was not originally meant to be part of the book but is an excerpt from a letter Guyon wrote in reply to questions from a reader.

The book also contains a Foreword written by Guyon upon the decision to offer the book to the public rather than the few people she had originally meant as readers. The book in this version also contains an Epilogue, written by the publishers and intended as additional information on Guyon, the book, and some of the contents.

Quotes

"Most Christians do not feel they have been called to a deep, inward relationship to their Lord. But we have all been called to the depths of Christ as surely as we have been called to salvation." Chapter 1, Page 1

"To receive any deep, inward profit from the Scripture, you must read as I have described. Plunge into the very depths of the words you read until revelation, like a sweet aroma, breaks out upon you." Chapter 2, Page 8

"The point is this: There is a fire within you and it ebbs and grows. That fire, when it ebbs, must be gently fanned, but only gently. Just as soon as that fire begins to burn, again cease all your efforts. Otherwise, you might put out the flame." Chapter 4, Page 23

"This little book is written to tell you how to experience the depths of Jesus Christ, but knowing the depths of Jesus Christ is not just a method. It is a life-long attitude." Chapter 6, Page 33

"You who have given yourself to the Lord during some pleasant season, please take note of this: If you gave yourself to Him to be blessed and to be loved, you cannot suddenly turn around and take back your life at another season when you are being crucified." Chapter 7, Page 37

"The Lord will not deceive you (that is, unless it is to bestow on you more abundance than you ever imagined)." Chapter 12, Page 65

"Depend on your Lord, not on yourself, to expose your sin and to show you the extent of your sin." Chapter 15, Page 74

"The soul can be active and yet utterly silent. This is because it is the Lord Himself who has become mover of the soul. The soul acts in response to the moving of His Spirit." Chapter 21, Page 93

"Now we have come to the final, deepest experience with God—the ultimate Christian experience. It is union with God." Chapter 21, Page 102

"Each of us does turn within. The way we do it, that is a different matter. The way we turn within is not the same for everyone." Chapter 22, Page 112

"Teach this simple experience, this prayer of the heart. Don't teach methods; don't teach some lofty way to pray. Teach the prayer of God's Spirit, not of man's invention."
Chapter 23, Page 122

"Oh the blindness of the greater part of mankind which prides itself on science and wisdom. How true it is, Oh my God, that You have hidden these wondrous things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes!" Chapter 24, Page 138

Topics for Discussion

What does Guyon say about the ability of the illiterate and unlearned to use her prayer methods to come to a deep understanding with the Lord? Do you agree? Explain.

Guyon admonishes that the correct way is to "teach the prayer of God's Spirit, not of man's invention." What does she mean by this? How can this be applied to daily life?

Describe Guyon's analogy of the wheel seen by Ezekiel. Describe the analogy of the purification of gold.

Where is it that Guyon says a person must turn in order to achieve a full prayer life? What are the steps that follow and what is the ultimate goal?

Guyon says that one must be "still" in order to fully achieve the relationship she describes. What is the reason Guyon gives for this? Is this biblical?

How does Guyon say a person must find and repent of sin? What does she say about one's ability to find his own sins? What other points does she make on this subject?

What does Guyon say about giving yourself to God "during a pleasant season"? Is this similar to a "fair weather Christian"? What happens to these people? Why?