



INTERIOR FREEDOM

BY JACQUES PHILIPPE

Prepared by Donna Garrett
RCSpirituality.org

Produced by Coronation
coronationmedia.com

OVERVIEW

INTERIOR FREEDOM

SUMMARY

This Study Circle Guide is designed to accompany the small book by Fr. Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom*. This book has become a kind of modern classic, translating age-old Catholic wisdom about spiritual growth into language and concepts applicable to our contemporary lives.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

Prayer and Spiritual Growth

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF SESSIONS

The book is divided into five short chapters, so the most logically plan would be to have one session devoted to each chapter – a total of five sessions. But the first chapter is sub-divided into four sections. This Guide provides a summary and questions for discussion for each of the four sections. So if a group wants to go slowly through this resource, this Guide provides material for as many as nine sessions.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Each participant should have a copy of this Study Circle Guide.
- Ideally, each participant should also have a copy of the book, *Interior Freedom*.
- It may be handy to have present at least one copy of the Catechism and, for groups made up of Regnum Christi members, a copy of the Regnum Christi Member's Handbook (RCMH).

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone. The book is written in a very simple style and does not require advanced knowledge of the Catholic faith. Because its focus is on the day-to-day living of the faith, the discussions that happen in a Study Circle about

this book will tend to be very personal. Participants will have to share personal comments in order for this Study Circle to work well in a small group.

The “Living the Doctrine” session of questions for discussion utilizes quotations from the Regnum Christi Member's Handbook. These may not be of much interest to non-RC members.

HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

The moderator should read each chapter and the relevant section of the Study Guide before each session.

The amount of homework required from other participants will depend on how much time they have available to invest. There are basically three modalities:

1. Individually, it can be used for personal study to discover and maintain the interior freedom that each human person has deep within them that no external power can take away.

The other two modalities are for group study.

2. The moderator may assign sections of the text and subsequent study questions to be read prior to the scheduled meeting. Each participant then is encouraged to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable doing.
3. A small group could read excerpts together and then spontaneously choose the study questions they would like to use. The page numbers after each question correspond to the excerpts of the text. Give the group time to read the excerpts and look for the answer, then members can offer their answer and discuss it. Move on to another question when you are ready. Members of the groups can choose questions that interest them the most. This method requires little preparation except on the part of the moderator; therefore it may not achieve the same depth of understanding of the resource. For busy people, however, this may be the best option.



SESSION I

CHAPTER ONE: FREEDOM AND ACCEPTANCE

FIRST SECTION: THE SEARCH FOR FREEDOM

Human beings were not created for slavery, but to be the lords of creation. This is explicitly stated in the Book of Genesis. We were not created to lead drab, narrow, or constricted lives, but to live in the wide-open spaces. We find confinement unbearable, simply because we were created in the image of God, and we have within us an unquenchable need for the absolute and the infinite.

Our most fundamental aspiration is for happiness; and we sense that there is no happiness without love, and no love without freedom. Freedom gives value to love, and love is the precondition of happiness. (Page 13)

When we feel stifled or trapped in some way by circumstances, we resent the institutions or people that seem to be there cause.

The desire for freedom is often misunderstood and becomes a desperate attempt to overcome limitations when in fact the limitations are found in the human heart. (Page 16)

There is a difference between choosing and consenting; being free also means consenting to what we did not choose. The difference between accepting what we did not choose by resignation or consenting to that which we cannot control is an attitude of the heart. (Pages 25–30)

“The soul cannot live without love, it always needs something to love: for it is made of love and it is for love that I created it.” —Dialogues St. Catherine Sienna Ch. 51

“Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed towards God, our beatitude.” —CCC 1731

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the author believe we find confinement unbearable? (Page 13)
2. What does he believe our most fundamental aspiration is? (Page 13)

3. For modern man, freedom means being bound by nothing. For the Christian, true freedom is different. How does the Christian find true freedom? (Page 14)
4. Contemplate a time in your life when you felt stifled or trapped. What needed to change, outward circumstances or your internal perspective, or both? What was your relationship with God at this time?
5. St. Therese exemplifies interior freedom. What impacted you when you read this section? (Page 18–20)
6. What does the author say our lack of freedom stems from? (Page 26)
7. What is the difference between choosing and consenting?
8. We show the greatness of our freedom when we transform reality, but also when we accept it trustingly as it is given to us day after day. What does the author believe is the paradoxical law of human life? (Page 28)
9. What are the three attitudes the author discusses regarding our response to this paradox? Contemplate a time in your life when you experienced these attitudes. What was being asked of you? Did you ever reach the attitude of consent?
10. What does the author state must change before we can move from resignation to consent?

NOTES



SECOND SECTION: ACCEPTING OURSELVES

The most important thing in our lives is not so much what we can do, as leaving room for what God can do. The person God wants to transform and touch with his love is not the person we want to be, but rather the person that we are. The great secret of all spiritual fruitfulness and growth is learning to let God act.

What often blocks the action of God's grace in our lives is our inability to accept our own weaknesses. The Holy Spirit never acts unless we freely cooperate. We must accept ourselves just as we are, if the Holy Spirit is to change us for the better. We must recognize that we cannot change ourselves by our own efforts but that all progress in the spiritual life, every victory over ourselves, is a gift of God's grace. *(Pages 32–35)*

Only under the gaze of God can we fully and truly accept ourselves. The greatest gift given those who seek God's face by persevering in prayer may be that one day they will perceive something of this divine look upon themselves and they will feel themselves loved so tenderly that they will receive the grace of accepting themselves in depth. God knows our weaknesses and infirmities, but he is not scandalized by them and doesn't condemn us. *(Pages 35–36)*

“As tenderly as a father treats his children, so Yahweh treats those who fear him; he knows what we are made of, he remembers that we are dust.” —Psalm 103

Sometimes subconsciously we deny ourselves happiness out of a sense of guilt. God sometimes calls us to make sacrifices but he also sets us free from fears and a false sense of imprisoning guilt. He restores to us the freedom to welcome the gifts he wishes to give us.

If we understand holiness properly, as the possibility of growing indefinitely in love for God and our brothers and sisters, we can be certain that nothing will be beyond our reach.

We don't all have in us the stuff of sages or heroes. But by God's grace we do have the stuff of Saints. *(Pages 38–43)*



THIRD SECTION: ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING

Having looked at self-acceptance, we now turn our attention to the acceptance of events. We rarely have difficulty in accepting something that brings us joy, but in reality many times what we are faced with are day-to-day events we did not choose that bring us inconvenience and suffering. The basic principle is the same: we cannot change our lives effectively until we can move from an attitude of resignation to an attitude of embracing even those situations we did not choose. This is an absolute fundamental truth: God can draw good out of everything.

It is not a matter of becoming passive and learning to endure everything without reacting. The natural thing to do in the face of suffering is to remedy it as much as we can. But there will always be sufferings that have no remedies, and these we must make an effort to accept peacefully. The most painful suffering is the suffering we reject and often it is not so much the suffering as it is the fear of suffering that causes us pain. (Pages 44–46)

Suffering makes us grow. It matures us, purifies us, teaches us to love unselfishly, makes us poor in heart, humble, gentle, and compassionate toward our neighbor. Fear of suffering hardens us in self-protective, often defensive attitudes that can lead us to make poor choices. (Page 47)

The only true security in this life lies in the certainty that God is faithful and can never abandon us because his fatherly tenderness is irrevocable. Full inner freedom comes from progressively freeing ourselves from the need for human security to the realization that God alone is all we need. (Pages 52–54)

It is certain that we will pass through phases in our lives where we cannot understand the reasons for what is happening. It is here we must turn to prayer, reflection, spiritual direction, and ultimately trust in God. Jesus remained completely free in his death, because he made it into an offering of love. By his free and loving consent, the life that was taken became a life given. Our freedom always has the power to make what is taken from us into something offered. (Pages 56–57)

The most important and fruitful acts of our freedom are not those by which we transform the outside world as those by which we change our inner attitude in light of the faith that God can bring good out of everything without exception. Even when externally there is nothing to be done, we still have inner freedom to continue to love. (Page 58)

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the distinction the author makes between passive acceptance of suffering, and freely choosing to embrace suffering? (Page 46)
2. What are the virtues one stands to gain by freely choosing the suffering they are given? What light does the author shed on your inner attitudes toward suffering? (Page 47)
3. Where does full inner freedom come from? (Page 53)
4. What can you do when God's will for your life seems elusive? (Page 54)
5. Sometimes suffering comes in the form of something or someone that is taken from you. How can this suffering offer incredible power to your spiritual growth? (Page 56)
6. What freedom does the author say all people still have in the deepest pit of helplessness? (Page 59)

QUESTION FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The author writes of "Helplessness in trials and the trials of Helplessness" As parents, spouses, family members, we all experience first hand both of these trials. Reflect on past times of helplessness in your life; which trial was it? How did you get past it?

LIVING THE DOCTRINE

Loving our neighbors, even in the midst of suffering, unites us more fully with Christ. Regnum Christi is an ecclesial Movement centered in Christ. Although Christ did not ask to suffer, he willingly embraced his cross for our salvation.

Saint John Paul II in *Salvifici Doloris* says; "Christ does not answer directly the meaning of suffering, instead, He says 'Follow Me!'. Come take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering, through my cross. Gradually, as the individual takes up his cross, spiritually uniting himself to the cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him." —Par. 26



Two columns of horizontal lines for writing.



SESSION 2

CHAPTER TWO: THE PRESENT MOMENT

SUMMARY

One of the essential conditions in interior freedom is the ability to live in the present moment. The only free act we can make in regard to the past is to accept it just as it was and leave it trustingly in God's hands. God is in the eternal present, every moment, whatever it brings, is filled with God's presence. We should learn to live each moment as sufficient to itself for God is there, and if God is there, we lack nothing. *(Pages 81–82)*

God is eternally present, eternally young, is eternal and new, and our past and future are his. He can forgive everything, purify everything, renew everything. In the present moment, because of his infinitely merciful love, we always have the possibility of starting again, not impeded by the past or tormented by the future. Living in the present permits our hearts to expand. The effort to live in the reality and in each moment is of the greatest importance in times of suffering. St. Therese of Lisieux said during her illness, "I only suffer for one moment. It is because people think about the past and the future that they become discouraged and despair." We can always have the grace to bear today the suffering that is ours now. *(Pages 82–83)*

It is a mistake to add the burden of the past to the weight of the present and a worse mistake to burden the present with the future. We can plan for the future without worry. Hearts anxious about tomorrow can't be open to the grace of the present moment. *(Page 89)*

We must not spend our whole lives waiting to live. We must put our hearts sufficiently into today so as not to miss the graces we should be receiving. *(Page 90)*

Today if we are successful, we pride ourselves on the ability to multitask. Unfortunately, often we have taken to multitasking relationships. Genuine love requires a different approach. Availability is essential in our relations with others. In every encounter with another person, however long or short, we should make him feel like there is no place else we would rather be. This is the expression of genuine love. A heart preoccupied by concerns and worries isn't available to other people. *(Page 91)*

The author speaks of two modes of time: time of the head and time of the heart. The first is psychological time, the time in our minds, which we divide into hours and days to be managed and planned. The second is God's time, the time of deep rhythms of grace in our lives. It is composed of a succession of moments harmoniously linked through our communion with God's will. *(Page 92)*

The Saints habitually lived in that interior time. To do that requires great interior freedom, total detachment from our own plans and programs and inclinations. We must be ready to live in total self abandonment, with no other concern than doing God's will and being fully available to people and events. We also need to experience in prayer God's presence within us and to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit. *(Page 93)*

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to say love has a present tense only? *(Page 83)*
2. The past casts shadows over the present whenever we brood over old failures and yesterday's choices. Living in the present moment requires leaving our failures in the confessional and the trusted hands of Jesus and moving forward into his presence. When was the last time you went to confession? Did you leave your sins with Christ, or did you take them with you? *(Page 87)*
3. Do you have an area in your life that brings you worry? When was the last time, you truly turned that worry over to Christ and trusted in his ability to handle it for you?
4. Contemplate your relationships with those you love, how many of those relationships do we conduct in the present moment? How many of them are cheapened by the selfish investment of our time?
5. Which mode of time do you spend most of your days focused on, head time or God's (heart) time? *(Page 92)*



Lined writing area consisting of two columns of horizontal lines for notes.



SESSION 3

CHAPTER THREE: THE DYNAMISM OF FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

SUMMARY

We can only acquire interior freedom to the degree we develop the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Today the word virtue has lost much of its meaning. Its Latin root *virtus*, means strength or power. The theological virtue of faith is strength for us. Hope, likewise, is not vague and dreamy, but confidence in the faithfulness of God who keeps his promises. This confidence gives us great strength. And the virtue of charity could be called the courage to love God and neighbor.

The three theological virtues constitute the essential dynamic of Christian life. For Christians, maturity means the ability to live by faith, hope, and love. The Commandments, prayer, sacraments and all the graces that come from God, even the loftiest of mystical experiences have just one purpose: to increase our faith, hope, and love. The theological virtues have a key role in the spiritual life because here our freedom and God's grace cooperate. (Pages 94–95)

Just as the rosary contains Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries, it could be said of the works of the Holy Spirit in our lives that there are outpourings that are joyful, sorrowful and glorious. Some outpourings of the Holy Spirit illuminate and reveal, some strip and impoverish, and some confirm and fortify. All three kinds are necessary: the first to give birth to faith, the second to teach us hope, and the third to give us the courage to love.

In the New Testament St. Peter's life gives witness to the same outpourings of the Holy Spirit. The first outpouring brought faith at the moment of his vocation when he felt impelled to leave everything to follow Jesus. Through Peter's denial of Jesus he experienced a deep outpouring of the Holy Spirit through God's mercy. Through the forgiving gaze of Jesus, Peter experienced hope. Hope is the virtue of people who know that they are infinitely weak and easily broken, and rely firmly on God with utter trust. Peter for the first time in his life made a real act of hope. Theological hope can only come from a radical experience of our poverty. Turning to the glorious mysteries, the author says we find that Pentecost was clearly a glorious

outpouring of the Holy Spirit for Peter and the other disciples. It filled them and fills us with God's presence and united them closely to Christ. Its most beautiful fruit is the courage to love. (Pages 98–101)

The image of the fire in the log used by St. John of the Cross is brought to the reader's attention. When fire approaches the log it first lightens it up and warms it. That corresponds to the joyful mystery. We are warmed by the love of God revealed to us. As the fire comes closer, the wood begins to blacken, smoke and smell. This is a sorrowful outpouring: the soul has the painful experiences of its own wretchedness. This phase lasts until the purifying fire has completed its work and the soul is totally transformed into a fire of love. Here is the glorious outpouring, in which the soul is strengthened in charity, the fire Jesus came to kindle on the earth. (Page 102)

The virtues of faith, hope, and love cannot be separated. Faith and hope are provisional; they exist only for this earth and will pass away. In heaven, faith will be replaced by sight, and hope by possession; only love will remain. On this earth, love is the fullest participation in the life of heaven, and faith and hope exist for its sake. (Page 103)

Love needs hope and hope is based on faith. There can be no charity without hope. Love needs space to grow and flourish. We were created to love. One of our deepest aspirations is to give ourselves to another. Love fails to grow when we don't really believe that God can make us happy. We set out on our own to create our own happiness and we don't wait to find the fullness of our existence in God. Therefore, we shape an artificial identity grounded in pride. Lack of trust in what God can do in our lives leads to shrinkage of the heart, a lessening of charity. (Pages 103–105)

It could be said that, while charity is the greatest of the three theological virtues, in practice, hope is the most important. As long as hope remains, love develops. (Page 107)



STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the text define the theological virtues, and how are they possessed? (Pages 94–96)
2. The author lists three outpourings of the Holy Spirit. How do these relate to the theological virtues? (Pages 97–103)
3. When contemplating the theological virtues in relation to the mysteries of the Rosary, where do you seem to spend most of your time? (Page 102)
4. What must you have if love is to grow? (Page 104)
5. What connection does the author see between hope and sin? (Page 108)

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How have I cultivated the virtues of faith, hope and love in my own life so as to participate more fully in the movement's mission to bring Christ's love to the world?
2. There are many apostolic initiatives born of the desire to bring love and hope to those in need. What experiences have you had in loving those in need and bringing hope to the hopeless?

QUESTIONS FOR LIVING THE DOCTRINE

1. Read the followings sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and try to explain them in your own words. Then think about and/or discuss what they would look like, in practice, in our lives today if we lived these truths more intensely.
 - *“The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful, to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being.”* —CCC 1813

- *“Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that the holy church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, he must profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.”* —CCC 1814–1815
- *“Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Hope responds to the aspiration to happiness, which God has placed in the heart of every man. It inspires man's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the kingdom of heaven. It keeps man from discouragement and sustains him during times of trial. Through hope man is led to happiness that flows from charity.”* —CCC 1817–1818
- *“Charity is the virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbors as ourselves for the love of God. Jesus makes charity the new commandment. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus, which they themselves received.”* —CCC 1822
- *“The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love.”* —CCC 1827

2. *“Regnum Christi's mission is not born of a passing need nor is it based on currently fashionable ideas, but on the church's urgent concern to make Christ's love known to mankind – for love is ultimately the essence of Christianity. And love is at one and the same time a joyful announcement and a binding commandment, reality and hope, a gift from God and a human task. Christ's kingdom becomes present in the world to the degree to which God's love is known, lived and transmitted to each heart and to society as a whole. As its specific service, Regnum Christi wishes to offer the church and the world at large its endeavor to make Christ's love an increasingly present and effective reality among people... To understand Regnum Christi's mission you must begin with a need deeply rooted in the heart of each individual -the need for a personal encounter with Christ and his merciful and*



SESSION 4

CHAPTER FOUR: FROM LAW TO GRACE—LOVE AS A FREE GIFT

SUMMARY

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” —Galatians 5:13-25

St. Paul is concerned lest believers lose the precious freedom won for them by Christ. The apostle denounces the two traps that can cause the loss of freedom: the law and the flesh.

The trap of the flesh is easy to understand. Instead of following the impulses of the spirit, people give themselves up, under a pretext of freedom, to their passions, to selfishness, and sin in all its forms. St. Paul reminds us of a classic teaching worth repeating in these confused times: licentiousness is not freedom. It is slavery, in which people are trapped by what is most superficial in humanity: self-centered desires, fears, weaknesses, and so on. We must wage an unceasing fight against the tendencies described by St. Paul, and remain permanently open to the healing graces that come from the cross of Christ. (Page 112)

For today’s reader, it is necessary to add that there are two things to be aware of if the fight against evil inclinations is to have any chance of success. First, our efforts will never be sufficient on their own. Only grace

can win us the victory. Therefore our chief weapons are prayer, patience, and hope. Second, one passion can only be cured by another – a misplaced love by a greater love, wrong behavior by right behavior that makes healthy provision for the desire underlying the wrong doing. (Page 113)

St. Paul wants to remind us of another trap for Christian freedom that is more subtle and harder to see, the trap of the law. It replaces the rule of grace with the rule of law. The law itself is good but the trap is this: if we take obeying the law as a condition for salvation we are saying salvation comes, not from God’s freely given love, but from our own deeds. The two modes of thought are directly opposed to each other. According to grace, we receive salvation and the love of God freely through Christ, apart from our merits, and we freely respond to that love by the good works the Holy Spirit inspires us to accomplish. One approach is based on God’s free unconditional love, and the other on our capacities and ourselves. We cannot take the law as the foundation for our relationship with God without running the risk of killing love and building our pride. (Pages 114–115)

Christ paid all mankind’s debts to God on the cross; he calls us to give him everything in return out of love and gratitude, not as repayment of a debt. We must realize that our works are not our own but are what God gives us the grace to do.

We have been placed on earth to learn to love in the school of Jesus. Learning to love is extremely simple: it means learning to give freely and receive freely. This lesson is simple but also hard for us to learn, because of sin. Giving freely is difficult for us. Our natural tendency is to give in order to receive.

It is just as difficult at times to receive freely. If we see something as a reward for our merits, something due to us, it is easier. Freely receiving the love of Christ which we do not deserve is much more difficult. God does not love us because of who we are, or what we do, God loves us because of who He is. God is love. (Pages 116–118)



SESSION 5

CHAPTER FIVE: SPIRITUAL POVERTY AND FREEDOM

SUMMARY

One of man's deepest needs is the need for identity. At the most superficial level, this need for identity often seeks satisfaction in material possessions and a certain external lifestyle: we identify ourselves with our riches, our physical appearance or our possessions. We are trying to satisfy a need for being by having. At a slightly higher level, the need to be seeks satisfaction through acquiring and exercising certain talents, whether sporting, artistic or intellectual. There is then a risk of confusing being with doing.

Identity is not rooted in the sum of one's aptitudes. Individuals have a unique value and dignity independent of what they can do. (Pages 120–121)

Insight is given into pride and spiritual poverty. We are all born with a deep wound, experienced as a lack of being. We seek to compensate by constructing a self different from our real self. When the gospel says we must die to ourselves, it means this artificial ego, this other self we have created, must die, so that the real self given to us by God can emerge. The same tendency can exist in our spiritual lives. Wanting to be someone like St. Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa can inspire us on the path to holiness. But this can become a problem if we identify ourselves with the spiritual good we are able to do. For this identity is also artificial and will collapse on the day one of our virtues fails or a particular spiritual talent into which we have poured our whole selves is taken from us. How can we endure failures, if we identify ourselves with our spiritual successes? (Pages 121–122)

Identification of the self with the good one is able to accomplish leads to spiritual pride: consciously or not we consider ourselves the source of that good, instead of recognizing that all the good we are able to do is a free gift from God. This pride leads us to pass judgment on those who do not accomplish as much as we do, to be impatient with those who prevent us from carrying out a given project and so forth. (Page 123)

Human beings are more than the sum of the good they can accomplish. They are children of God. He loves us for ourselves, because he has yet adopted us as his children forever.

This is why humility, spiritual poverty, is so precious: it locates our identity securely in the one place where it will be safe from all harm. If our treasure is in God, no one can take it from us. (Page 124)

Spiritual trials serve to purify us and to destroy whatever is artificial in our character. People do not lose their love for God, for their whole being remains completely oriented toward God; but they lose the feeling of love. The benefit of this trial is that it deprives us of any possibility of relying on the good that we can do. God's mercy is all. Father Philippe shares advice given to him once by a fellow priest in confession: "When you no longer believe in what you can do for God, continue believing in what God can do for you."

Once we understand that the basis for our relationship to God no longer lies in us but wholly and exclusively in God, we become fully free. People who have passed through spiritual trials are more than ever in love with God and wish to please him by good works, but the good they do is done purely, freely, and disinterestedly. It does not proceed from a need to create an identity or a thirst for success. Nor does it have the hidden motive of wanting a reward. Its source is God.

There are many trials in life and not all of them are spiritual trials. God makes use of everything, even the consequences of our sins! (Pages 125–129)

Mature Christians, who have truly become children of God, are those who have experienced their radical nothingness, absolute poverty, been reduced to nothing. At the bottom of that nothingness, they have finally discovered the inexpressible tenderness, the absolute unconditional love of God; in other words they have come face-to-face with the boundless mercy of God. (Page 129)

Spiritual poverty, utter dependence on God and his mercy, is the condition for interior freedom.



