De Sales Discussions

Francis De Sales: Introduction to the Devout Life and Treatise on the Love of God

by Wendy M. Wright

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General Discussion Guidelines and Hints

A discussion is a group of people engaged in conversation. This is a natural human activity: an interesting, exciting and creative experience. Discussion is a shared pursuit of responsive understanding -- of yourself, others and the material under consideration.

The purpose of a leader is to be a catalyst. He/she is present to help everyone (1) make a thoughtful examination of the meaning of the material to be discussed and the problems it presents, (2) clarify their thinking and feeling about the problems, and (3) decide their individual response. It is not presumed that a leader necessarily knows more about the subject under discussion, but that the person is trained and prepared to lead this discussion and offer this special kind of assistance to the group.

Don't expect pre-packaged or 'right' answers. Neither the leader nor a member of the group will provide a conclusive answer at the end of the discussion. Each of you will try to find personally satisfying answers; your pursuit of answers may continue long after anyone discussion period ends. The discussion provides information and deepened understanding, but the real answers will be your personal response to life and the world.

What Happens Before the Discussion?

Read over the text selection at least once and preferably twice, first for general comprehension and second for attention to specifics. On the second reading, underline words and phrases you consider important, and make notes in the margins of anything you did not understand; questions you would like to ask your group, and examples or applications that occur to you; What important ideas does it convey? How? Do these ideas conflict with other ideas or feelings you have? Are problem situations presented? How would you behave in such situations? Why?

What can I do to participate well in the discussion?

- Be committed and involved in the group.
- Treat others in the group with support and respect, even if you disagree with their views.
- Express support and agreement with others when appropriate.
• Be mindful of your nonverbal communication and behavior when you are not speaking

• Stick to the point.

• Say it in the group (not before or after to a few friends).

• Respect the confidentiality of others' disclosures.

• Make the meetings. It's difficult to re-create the discussion experience for you, and the group suffers from your absence and input when you're not there.

• Stay on the subject. Speak about the text, your reactions and others' responses.

• Speak to the entire group, not just one person.

• Seek your own understanding. Don't accept another's view as your own unless it makes sense to you.

• Be sure you understand what another is saying. This is especially true when you disagree with him or her.


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After you have read each section,

1) What touched you in that section?
2) What are the most important points, feelings, truths that you want to hold onto, to incorporate in your own life?
3) How do these writings affirm what you already believe?
4) How do these writings challenge anything that you believe?
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Session One

Pages 1 through 28

1) What did you learn from reading Wendy Wright’s discussion of how to read the spiritual classics?

2) Do you want to read them? If so, why?

3) Francis de Sales talks about the "Universal Call to Holiness." What is holiness for you?

4) Do you think you can "achieve" holiness and how?

5) Any other thoughts you would like to share?
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Session Two

Pages 29 through 55 (top)

1) How do you understand St. Francis de Sales' concept of True Devotion? Is the word "Devotion" easy or hard for you to understand? Why?

2) How do you see the practice of devotion being adapted to your strengths, life situations and duties?

3) What does "Live Jesus" mean to you?

4) Are there any topics raised that you would like to deal with next time?
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Session Three

Pages 55 through 73

1) What is a "Spiritual Nosegay?" Why is it important? What can it do for me?

2) Fidelity to prayer is essential. Yet, in my very busy life, how do I find the time to pray and under what circumstances can I pray? What do I do that can be turned into prayer? How do I think Francis de Sales would look upon my efforts?

3) Are there other ways to nourish the "Devout Life?"

4) Are there any topics raised that you would like to deal with next time?
Session Four

Pages 73 through 87

1) What was the image of Jesus you had as a child? What is the image of Jesus you now have? Has the image of Jesus changed for you? How does this image compare or relate to Francis de Sales' image of Jesus?

2) What is humility according to Francis de Sales?

3) What does it mean to love our abjection?

4) Are there any topics raised that you would like to deal with next time?
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Session Five

Pages 87 through 103

1) How can we practice real poverty amid riches?

2) How can we practice richness in real poverty?

3) What is genuine friendship?

4) How do we continue to renew the practice of Devotion?

5) If we have time, we might want to revisit last session’s question "What does it mean to love our abjection?"
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Session Six

Pages 104 through 128 (top)

1) What is the tenor and tone of Francis' letters? What do you learn of the man from reading them?

2) What does Francis mean by the phrase "the Freedom of the Children of God?" (p 115)

3) What method does Francis use to discern the will of God? (p 121)

4) What does Francis say about prayer "as being in the presence of God?" (p 126)
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Session Seven

Pages 128 through 148

1) In Francis’ Conference on Cordiality, what is the way to "Live Jesus" and how should one deal with one’s own faults? (pp 128-133)

2) How does Francis see the relationship between God and humankind? (pp 136-140)

3) How do we express our love of God?

4) What is prayer and what are the differences between meditation and contemplation? (pp 142-148)
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Session Eight

Pages 148 to end

1) What does it mean to "Live between the Wills?" (p 149)

2) How can trials be considered "perfectly golden, lovable, unspeakably precious?" (p 156)

3) Would you like to share some of your key words?

4) Are there any other topics we raised during this discussion series that you would like to discuss?
Evaluation  
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1. In broad strokes, my experience of this discussion program was
   Poor 2 Good 4 Excellent

2. What I learned during this discussion series was...
   Not useful 2 Useful 4 Very Useful

3. During this discussion program, I really liked...

4. I would have enjoyed the discussion program more if...

5. Would you like to see a program like this to continue? If so, what Salesian topics or works would you like to explore?

6. Would you suggest any changes to the time, duration, and frequency of the discussion group?

Your Name _________________________________________Date ___________________

Name of Parish/School/Ministry _____________________________________________

12