

Experiencing the of Presence of God
2 Years of Transformation by Mind Renewal
(of Frank Laubach and Bob Clarkson)

**Dr. Frank C. Laubach, serving as a missionary at
Dansalan, Lake Lanao, Philippine Islands**

INTRODUCTION

A rare experience awaits anyone who reads the selections from the letters of Frank Laubach. In them a great spirit has opened the very doors of his soul and invited us into the inner sanctuary to share his experience of God. To read this book quietly and with sympathetic insight is to find oneself transported into an atmosphere of dedication, of discernment and of spiritual intimacy which reminds one of St. Francis of Assisi. It is as exciting as breathing the ozone of a mountain summit and makes the reader long to rise on the wings of the spirit as the author has.

Who is this man who expresses himself, when occasion requires, in the scientific language of the day yet speaks with a timeless voice of a great mystic? It is very characteristic of Dr. Laubach that in his letters he gives us only the barest glimpses of himself and his work. The fascinating story of his service to the Moros during the years when the letters were written is barely mentioned. What is of supreme importance to him and what he wants in all modesty to share with others is his own inner spiritual experience, yet to know something more of the man and his work gives greater meaning to the letters.

Frank C. Laubach went with his wife to the Philippines as a missionary in 1915. For the first seven years of his service he gave himself unreservedly and with great effectiveness to the building of evangelical churches on the North Coast of the great southern island of Mindanao and to the broader contacts with the culture and leadership in the Islands. These churches on the North Coast have continued to progress and still show markedly the effect of his formative influence.

He helped establishment and conduct the work of a Union Theological Seminary in Manila. Dr. Laubach was also a prime spiritual leader in the changing life of the city. It was during this period that Dr. Laubach wrote impressive books about the Philippines. All the time he was doing these things thought went with increasing frequency to the Mohammedan Moros on the Island of Mindanao with whom he had had some contacts during the first period of his service. These were a wild and backward people, about 500,000 in number, who looked upon the Christian Filipinos as their traditional enemies. They seemed almost completely inaccessible to approach by a Christian missionary. To win them, as he well knew, would require unbounded patience and great Christian resourcefulness. Dr. Laubach believed in the power of God to accomplish even this task and felt that he had a call to undertake it. So in 1930 Dr. Laubach went to Dansalan in the uplands of Mindanao to begin his service for the Moros.

The letters reflect with complete frankness the lonesomeness of those first days. For reasons of health

and education Mrs. Laubach and their surviving son Robert were compelled to stay at another mission station, and he was alone. He was isolated from any intimate fellowship with them. It was this loneliness that led him to the deep mystic experience of God recorded in his letters.

It was not long before the Moros began to realize the genuine love of the Spirit of this American who had come among them simply as a simple friend. As he helped them in various practical ways their response grew in cordiality until, in a short time, they had come to regard him as their best friend. And this indeed he was, for he discerned their greatest needs and with untiring industry and creative ability of a rare order set out to meet them. In 1930 he found these Moros almost entirely an illiterate people. It is probably fair to say that nearly half of the 90,000 who lived around the lake learned to read and write. He prepared them to play their part in the modern world, while helping them to preserve the valuable elements in their culture.

This man who writes with such poetic beauty of his inner spiritual experiences was also a man of intense practical activity. He devised remarkably effective methods of adult education. He developed industries and health services. He stimulated the introduction of better seed and in myriad ways proved himself to be a genuine friend. No one who reads these letters can fail to see that above all Dr. Laubach yearned to help them to a richer experience of God. He did not seek to win them to religion, although many became believers, but he desired to make a deep and transforming spiritual experience the basis of their life.

Experiencing the Presence of God

Chapter 1: How Transformation Began

January 3, 1930

To be able to look back and say, "This has been the finest year of my life.", that is glorious! But anticipation! To be able to look ahead and say, "The present year can and shall be better!", that is more glorious!

If we said such things about our achievements, we would be consummate egotists. But if we are speaking of God's kindness, and we speak truly, we are but grateful. And this is what I do witness. I have done nothing but open windows – God has done all the rest. There have been few if any conspicuous achievements. There has been a succession of marvelous experiences of the presence of God. I feel, as I look back over the year, that it would have been impossible to have held much more without breaking with sheer joy. It was the most lonesome year, in some ways the hardest year, of my life, but the most gloriously full of voices from heaven.

As for me I resolved that I would succeed better this year with my experiment of filling every minute full of the thought of God than I succeeded last year. The more I include Him in the mundane choices, the more divine they become.

January 20, 1930

Although I have been a minister and a missionary for fifteen years, I have not lived the entire day of every day in minute by minute effort to follow the will of God. Two years ago a profound dissatisfaction led me to begin trying to line up my actions with the will of God about every fifteen minutes or every half hour. Other people to whom I confessed this intention said it was impossible. I judge from what I have heard that few people are really trying even that. But this year I have started out trying to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, "What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this minute?"

It is clear that this is exactly what Jesus was doing all day every day.

January 26, 1930

For the past few days I have been experimenting in a more complete surrender than ever before. I am taking by deliberate act of will, enough time from each hour to give God much thought. Yesterday and today I have made a new adventure, which is not easy to express. I am feeling God in each movement, by an act of will – willing that He shall direct these fingers that now strike this typewriter - willing that He shall pour through my steps as I walk - willing that He shall direct my words as I speak, and my very jaws as I eat!

You will object to this intense introspection. Do not try it, unless you feel dissatisfied with your own relationship with God, but at least allow me to realize all the leadership of God I can. I am disgusted with the pettiness and futility of my wandering self. If the way out is not more perfect slavery to God then what is the way out? Paul speaks of our liberty in Christ. I am trying to be utterly free from everybody, free from my own self, but completely enslaved to the will of God every moment of this day.

We used to sing a song in the church in Benton which I liked, but which I never really practiced until now. It runs:

"Moment by moment I'm kept in His love.
Moment by moment I've life from above..
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine.
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine."

It is exactly that, moment by moment, in every waking moment, surrender, responsiveness, obedience, sensitiveness, pliability, 'lost in His love,' so that I now have the mind-bent to explore with all my might, to respond to God as a violin responds to the bow of the master.

In defense of my opening my soul and laying it bare to the public gaze in this fashion, I may say that it seems to me that we really seldom do anybody much good excepting as we share the deepest experiences of our souls in this way. It is not the fashion to tell your inmost thoughts, but there are many wrong fashions, and concealment of the best in

us is wrong. I disapprove of the usual practice of talking 'small talk' whenever we meet, and holding a veil over our souls. If we are so impoverished that we have nothing to reveal but small talk, then we need to struggle for more richness of soul. As for me I am convinced that this spiritual pilgrimage which I am making is infinitely worthwhile, the most important thing I know of to talk about. And talk I shall while there is anybody to listen.

Outside the window, as I completed the last page, has been one of the most splendid sunsets I have ever seen. And these words came singing through my soul, "Looking to Jesus 'till glory doth shine!" Open your soul and entertain the glory of God and after a while that glory will be reflected in the world about you and in the very clouds above your head.

... When you read the myriad letters between the ones above and the last letter written two years later, you can feel the spiritual and emotional changes that comprised the lion's share of the radical transformation that happened to Frank as he pours his heart onto each page. ...

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Chapter 12: At Arm's Length with God

I cannot get God by holding him off at arm's length like a photograph, but by leaning forward intently as one would respond to one's lover. Love so insatiable as the love of God can never be satisfied until we respond to the limit. Nor will He be satisfied until His aching arms receive my neighbors, too, and all the surging multitudes of the world, all of us together responding to Him and to one another.

September 28, 1931 - A gentle pressure of the Will -

When one has struck some wonderful blessing that all mankind has a right to know about, no custom or false modesty should prevent him from telling it, even though it may mean the exposing of his soul to the public gaze.

I have found such a way of life. I ask nobody else to live it, or even to try it. I only witness that it is wonderful, it is indeed heaven on earth. And it is very simple, so simple that any child could practice it: Just to dialog with God in silence, and to keep on all day without stopping, even when doing other work of every kind.

This simple practice requires only a gentle pressure of the will, not more than a person can exert easily. It grows easier as the habit becomes fixed. Yet it transforms life into heaven. Or you might think of it as bringing heaven to earth. Everybody takes on a new richness, and all the

world seems tinted with glory. I do not of course know what others think of me, but the joy which I have within cannot be described. If there never were any other reward than that, it would more than justify the practice to me.

When I am reminded of my purpose, to make God my most significant other, and start again holding people, seen and unseen, before God, a new exhilaration comes to me, and all the fatigue vanishes.

October 11, 1931 - Deepening Discovery -

Knowing God better and better is an achievement of friendship. "When two persons fall in love there may be such a strong feeling of fellowship, such a delight in the friend's presence, that one may lose oneself in the deepening discovery of another person." The self and the person loved become equally real.

There are, therefore, three questions which we may ask, "Do you believe in God?" That is not getting very far. "The devils believe and tremble. Second, "Are you acquainted with God?" We are acquainted with people with whom we have had some business dealings. Third, "Is God your friend?" or putting this another way, "Do you love God, that is, have genuine deep feelings of affection?"

It is this third stage that is really vital. How is it to be achieved? Precisely as any friendship is achieved. By doing things together. The depth and intensity of the friendship will depend upon variety and extent of the things we do and enjoy together. Will the friendship be constant? That

again depends upon the permanence of our common interests, and upon whether or not our interests grow into ever widening circles, so that we do not stagnate. The highest friendship demands growth. "It must be progressive as life itself is progressive." Friends must walk together; they cannot long stand still together, for that means death to friendship and to life.

Far more than any other device of God to create love was the **cross** where the most loving person the world has known hangs loving through all His pain. That cross has become the symbol of religion and of love for a third of the world because it touches the deepest depths of human love. All I have said is mere words, until one sets out with extreme resolve not to stop pursuing intimacy with God; constantly loving and talking it over with God. Then there comes a great sense of the close, warm intimate heart of reality. God simply creeps in and you know He is here in your heart. He has become your dearest friend by a simple and profound awareness of His presence at all times.

So if anybody were to ask me how to find God I should say at once, hunt out the deepest desire you can find in God and forget all about your own comfort while you pursue Him. Talk to God about it as often as you think of Him and He will be there. You will feel Him in you.

January 2, 1932

Learn to hold God by the hand and rest. In school a teacher lays out work for his pupils. I resolve to accept each situation of this year as God's layout for that hour, and never to lament that it is a very commonplace or disappointing task. One can find or pour something divine into every situation.

One of the mental characteristics against which I have rebelled most is the frequency of my "blank spells" when I cannot think of anything worth writing, and sometimes cannot remember names. When this happens, I resolve to regard these as God's signal that I am to stop and listen. Sometimes you want to talk to your lover, and sometimes you want to hold your lover tight in silence. God is that way with us. He wants to hold still with us in silence:

Here is something we can share with all of the people in the world: They cannot all be brilliant or rich or beautiful. They cannot all even dream beautiful dreams like God gives some of us. They cannot all enjoy music. Their hearts do not all burn with love: But everybody can learn to hold God by the hand and rest. And when God is ready to speak, the fresh thoughts of heaven will flow in like a crystal spring. Everybody rests at the end of the day. What a world gain if everybody could rest in the waiting arms of the Father, and listen until He whispers even in the middle of the messy and noisy day.

I know that He makes my thought-life beautiful when I am open all the day to Him. If I throw these mind-windows open and say "God, what shall we think of now?" He

answers always in some graceful, tender dream. And I know that God is love hungry, for He is constantly there!

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Conclusion: Final reflection by Frank Laubach

Below me lay the rice fields and as I looked across them I heard my tongue saying aloud, "Child, just as the rice needs the sunshine every day, and could not grow if it had sun only once a week or one hour a day, so you need me all day of every day. People all over the world are withering because they are open toward God only rarely. Every waking minute is not too much!"

One thing I have seen is that God loves beauty. Everything He makes is lovely. ... And I know that He makes my thought-life beautiful when I am open all the day to Him. If I throw these mind-windows open and say "God, what shall we think of now?" He answers always in some graceful, tender dream. And I know that God is love hungry, for He is constantly revealing His purpose for everything that happens in my life.

Oh God, how I long to help you with these Moros. And with these Americans! And with these Filipinos! And especially so many Christians who don't know this kind of intimacy. I want them to know my discovery! That any minute can be paradise; that any place can be heaven! That any man can have God! That every man does have God the moment he speaks to God, or listens for Him!

It may be enough for you to just ‘know about God’ and to have ‘tomes of information about Him and His Word.’ But God has offered to everyone this amazing sensation of tenderness and passionate love for Him. And it is only this passionate affection for God which, in the Holy Spirit, we can lavish on others, even our enemies that distinguishes the Christian from all other people.

In the natural, it is all about me. This keeps me twisted-gut anxious, or angry, or bitter toward others. I can, in the natural, force myself to minister to others in ways that, for all intents and purposes, look like ‘acts of love.’ However posing as a lover is a far cry from the enormous, generous love Jesus demonstrated for us when He paid the penalty for our sins. He paid for all of them so that we could approach Him blamelessly and shamelessly regardless of our current short-comings. It is, after all is said and done, the greatest desire of every human being, to be genuinely loved and unconditionally accepted by another person! In an intimate relationship with God, we can be that person whose genuine affection draws them to God!

Experiencing the of Presence of God 2 Years of Transformation by Mind Renewal

(by Bob Clarkson, Editor)

Testimony of Editor-in-Chief, Bob Clarkson, another Modern Mystic, serving now as a spiritual guided and devotee of Jesus Christ at Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Bob was born in Los Angeles in the mid-twentieth century to parents dedicated to God and the pursuit of evangelism as lay persons in the faith. After his family was moved to Detroit, Bob was ‘born again’ during an encounter with God in his early teens in his own bedroom where God engaged him in this dialog:

“Did you just tell your Pastor that you would be a pastor if I asked you to be?” “Yes,” Bob replied. “Did you mean that?” God asked. “Well, no. It was just the best answer I could think of so as not to be embarrassed when Pastor Allen asked me the question in front of the evangelist and our large congregation.”

God went silent. After a very brief pause, Bob spoke again after realizing that the God of Universe cared enough to ask him these questions in the privacy of his own home, “I

will say it again now and I do mean it!” At that instant Bob was overwhelmed by a feeling of affection for God that rivaled even His marital love affair. Bob was certain that this was his ‘new birth!’ Subsequently, when God asked, Bob pursued formal training and was ordained to serve as a pastor in a church in Philadelphia.

After a short time in the pulpit ministry, getting married and moving back to Los Angeles, God redirected Bob into the field of Computer Science where he pioneered in many areas of technological engineering and implementation of systems upon which the current AI technologies depend. Then at God’s direction Bob moves with his family back to Philadelphia and then to North Carolina where he currently resides.

As Bob puts it, “I was one of the most intentional, avid, energetic, purveyors of the Word of God with an intense focus on bringing people to Christ for salvation. I served in nearly every capacity in my churches and taught thousands of Bible Study meetings. But after 40 years in this avid pursuit of the knowledge of God, I came to feel as though I had somehow missed the point. I could not give you the name of a single person who I had personally led to ‘faith in Jesus.’ So I asked God to release me from the ‘Christian fortress-church’ and bring me to fruitful living in Christ.”

Shortly after the turn of the century and 10 years before retirement from a highly successful career in business and church, God introduced Bob to Dr. Laubach’s letters,

Brother Lawrence's transformation, and Oswald Chambers' works. At this point, he embarked on a similar journey. For Bob it was also about a 2 year quest. But the rewards were immense.

Well, as God would have it, Bob stayed in church, but began a transformation by renewing his mind stated in Romans 12:2. Once having arrived in a place of love, joy and peace in God which exceeded all human imagination, he began to see much fruit of the Spirit in his life. He led many to faith in Jesus and deeper love for God in the ensuing years.

Bob offered editorial assistance to John Henry Alan, "Let's Fall in Love with God," and began creating manuscripts of interviews, sermons and other messages which help convey this message of 'Intimacy with God.' As Bob now says, "Like most Christians in my circles, I thought that my 'intensity' for God was the same as 'intimacy.' I also mistook 'ecstasies' with God in worship experiences were the same as 'intimacy.' Once I realized that the intensity and ecstasies were self serving and gave me a 'good feeling' about myself, I told God I wanted more of Him and less of me." Hopefully, the letters of Frank Laubach, Conversations and letters of Brother Lawrence and the Oswald Chambers' devotions in "My Utmost for His Highest" will help you find the greatest joy and satisfaction in Jesus that you have ever known! It is likely to stagger your imagination!