

*Blessed are they who
plumb their own depths
and by daily efforts
prepare themselves to
understand.*

The Imitation, Book 3.
Chapter 1



MFK COACHING PRESENTS

THE IMITATION

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**A 15TH CENTURY GUIDE TO THE 21ST
CENTURY LIFE**

INTRODUCTION

At the center of all growth is our desire “to be delivered from all blindness of heart.” So begins the 1418 spiritual treatise *The Imitation of Christ* by the German-Dutch monk Thomas Hemerken of Kempen, better known as Thomas à Kempis. “The Imitation,” while considered a chiefly Catholic spiritual guide, contains lessons and teachings are universal in nature and provide guidance no matter what one’s religious orientation is. In short, it may be the very first “Life Coach” instructional manual ever written. However, what places The Imitation in a league of its own is that it focuses on the “inner life” and clarity of purpose in deepening our understanding of self. This is the chief and only goal. There is no backdrop of self-improvement for purposes of making you a millionaire.

While The Imitation was primarily for monks and ascetics, its teachings derive directly from the very bedrock of self-exploration and peace of mind. In essence, the core principle that informs our vision regarding our peace of mind is ***humility and gratitude reached through rigorous honesty.***

The Imitation is comprised four books, the first three of which will be the focus of this course. Taken together the first three books present the fundamental principles to develop peace of mind in conjunction with the importance of accountability. à Kempis challenged his readers to internalize “*Without the Way, you cannot go; without the Truth, you cannot know; without the Life, you cannot live.*”

Over a seven-week period the group will focus on specific lessons and touchstones for introspection in the assigned chapters and relate specific lessons included therein – separate and apart from the religious context of the chapter’s contents – to their lives. First and foremost, discussions will revolve around the secular (non-religious) aspects of the chapters and incorporation of these lessons into our daily lives. In order to make the course most beneficial for each participant, the weekly discussion will be group intensive and focus on topics such as disordered affections, accountability, humility, gratitude, grace, peace, clarity and to what extent each of these concepts exist in each participant’s daily life. The natural by-product of such interaction is a growing introspection which will force us to ask “why we do the things we do? and what is to be gained by our actions?” à Kempis stresses his readers to “listen internally” and understand that change can only happen through a sincere meeting of head and heart.

THE COURSE

Seven weeks of reading and a weekly group discussion relating to the previous week's reading and how the topics relate to or are missing in our daily lives. Each week's discussion is 90 (ninety) minutes, and all are encouraged to participate – life is full contact. Each chapter is on average $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page long (some a little longer and some a little shorter.) Each participant will be provided with a digital copy of The Imitation. Should anyone wish to purchase their own copy, the version that I will be using for the course is: The Imitation of Christ, Thomas a Kempis, The Contemporary Translation by William C. Creasy with a Spiritual Commentary by Dennis Billy, C.Ss. R. (Published 2005)

While The Imitation itself is a religious/spiritual classic, the focus of the course will be non-religious in nature with a focus on the universal lessons contained therein. Each week's study/assignment is broken out below. I have chosen a focus word/s and specific dialogue from each chapter as a guide to the individual chapter's focus and the topics we will be working on in each chapter. Often, these focus words drive the weekly conversation and discussion. The aim of the course will be to generate a deeper level of clarity and self-awareness as a result of the weekly reading and discussions. Such self-awareness will serve each participant in their effort to eliminate the obstacles that prevent them from becoming what they want to be.

THE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1. BOOK ONE: Admonitions Useful for a Spiritual Life

Chapter 1. Of the Imitation of Christ, and Contempt of All the Vanities of the World

Vanity

It is vanity to chase after what the world says you should want and to long for things you should not have, the things you will pay a high price for later on if you get them.

Chapter 2. Of Thinking Humbly of Ourselves
Reflection

This is the greatest and most useful lesson we can learn: to know ourselves for what we truly are, to admit freely our weaknesses and failings, and to hold a humble opinion of ourselves because of them.

Chapter 3. Of the Doctrine of Truth
Understanding

Who has a more fierce struggle than the person who strives to master himself (or herself)? And this is our occupation: to strive to master ourselves and daily to grow stronger and to advance from good to better.

Chapter 4. Of Wisdom and Forethought in Our Actions
Discretion

It is great wisdom not to be rash in our actions nor to persist stubbornly in our own opinions. What is more, it wise not to believe everything you hear nor to be so eager to pass on rumors.

Chapter 5. Of the Reading of Holy Scriptures
“OM” “OHM” “AHM”

Do not ask “who said this?” but pay attention to what is said.

Chapter 6. Of Inordinate Affections

People Pleasing

There is no peace in the heart of a slave.

Chapter 7. Of Fleeing from Vain Hope and Pride

Pride

A person who is humble is always at peace, but a proud person carries a heart filled with envy and resentment.

WEEK 2. THE FIRST BOOK CONTINUED; INTRODUCTION TO BOOK TWO: Suggestions Drawing One Toward The Inner Life Book 1.

Chapter 8. That Too Much Familiarity Is to Be Shunned

Prudence

. . . do not be eager to be seen with important people.

Chapter 9. Of Obedience and Subjection

Surrender

. . . but to refuse to yield to others when reason or cause requires it is a sign of pride and stubbornness.

Chapter 10. Of Avoiding Superfluity in Words

Gossip

I wonder why we are so eager to chatter and gossip with each other, since we seldom return to the quiet of our own hearts without a damaged conscience?

Chapter 11. Of the Obtaining of Peace, and Zealous Desire for Progress in Grace

Control

If you cannot overcome small trivial things, when will you overcome difficult ones?

Chapter 12. Of the Profit of Adversity

Hardship

“Of the Profit of Adversity” – . . . troubles are often aids to humility, and they protect us from pride.

THE SCHEDULE (CONT.)

Book 2.

Chapter 1. Of God Speaking Within You

Contract

The person who understands all things as they are and not as they are said to be, is truly wise . .

Chapter 2. Of Humble Submission

Liberation

The humble person in the midst of trouble is filled with peace.

WEEK 3. BOOK ONE AND BOOK TWO CONTINUED

Book 1.

Chapter 13. Of Resisting Temptation

Vigilance

The beginning of all evil temptations is a mind not firmly fixed on its purpose.

Chapter 14. Of Avoiding Hasty Judgments

Judgment

In judging others, a person works to no purpose, often makes mistakes, and easily does the wrong thing, but in judging and analyzing ourselves, we always work to our own advantage.

Chapter 15. Of Works Done Out Of Love

Purity

Never do what you know is wrong for anything in the world or to please anyone.

Chapter 16. Of Bearing With the Defects of Others

Patience

It is evident how rarely we think of our neighbors as ourselves.

Chapter 17. Of the Monastic Life

Discipline

You have come to serve, not to rule. Know that you are called to endurance and work, not idleness and talk.

Chapter 18. Of the Examples of the Holy Fathers

Dedication

What courageous struggles they waged to overcome their weaknesses.

Book 2.

Chapter 3. Of the Good and Peaceful Person

Peace

If you want others to put up with you, you must put up with them.

Chapter 4. Of a Pure Feelings and Simple Intentions

Intention

Simplicity should be in intention, purity in feelings.

WEEK 4. BOOK ONE AND BOOK TWO CONTINUED

Book 1.

Chapter 19. Of the Exercises of a Good Religious Person

Harmony

Progress follows intention.

We must examine our outward and inward affairs and set them both in order, for both are necessary for our spiritual progress.

Chapter 20. Of the Love of Solitude and Silence

Leadership

As often as I went out among men (and women), I returned less a man (or woman). We often experience this when we have spent a long time in idle chatter.

Chapter 21. Of Compunction of Heart

Drama

Do not be drawn into other people's affairs nor entangle yourself with the concerns of people in high places. Always keep an eye on yourself first and take special care to correct yourself before correcting your friends.

Chapter 22. Of the Consideration of Human Misery

Bondage

You will see that all these possessions and honors are awfully flimsy; even more, they are oppressive, because a person never has them without fear and anxiety.

Chapter 23. Of Meditation on Death

Work

You ought to master yourself in every act and thought as if you were to die today. . . It would be better to guard against sins than to run away from death.

THE SCHEDULE (CONT.)

Book 2.

Chapter 5. Of Paying Attention To Oneself

Awareness

If you wish to have peace and true wholesomeness, you must set aside everything else and tend to your own affairs.

Chapter 6. Of the Joy Of A Good Conscience

Confidence

The person who has great peace of heart pays no attention to either praise or blame. . . Praise does not make you holy; blame does not make you worthless.

WEEK 5. COMPLETION BOOK ONE; BOOK TWO CONTINUED;

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK 3; Of Inner Comfort

Book 1.

Chapter 24. Of Judgment, and the Punishment of Sinners

Account

The more lax you are now and the more you attend to bloating your own self-importance, the more severely you will pay later on.

Chapter 25. Of the Zealous Amendment of Our Whole Life

Diligence

There is one thing that keeps many people from gaining ground and from fervently striving to improve: the dread of difficulty, or more accurately, the effort of the struggle.

Final Lesson of Book One:

Two things especially lead to great improvement: 1) the will to drag yourself from the things that will naturally harm you; and 2) the desire to pursue the good things that you need the most.

Questions for Introspection:

- 1) What harms me?
- 2) What are the things I need the most?
- 3) What is humility?

Book 2.

Chapter 7. Of Loving Jesus Above All Else

Narcissism

If you trust in appearances, you will quickly be deceived; if you look for comfort and gain in others, you will often be disappointed.

Chapter 8. Friendship With Jesus

Poverty

Be pure and free of heart, and do not be wrapped up in any other person.

Chapter 9. Of Emptiness

Submission

We must each wage a long and fierce inner struggle before we can learn to master ourselves fully.

Book 3.

Chapter 1. Of Christ Speaking In Your Own Heart

Silence

I shall listen . . . true happiness.

WEEK 6. COMPLETION BOOK TWO AND BOOK THREE CONTINUED

Book 2.

Chapter 10. Of Gratitude for the God's Grace

Gratitude

If you consider the dignity of the giver, no gift will seem small or unimportant.

Chapter 11. How Few Are the Lovers of the Cross of Jesus

Not-self

". . . Untainted by self-interest"

Chapter 12. Of the King's Highway of the Holy Cross

Recognition

You cannot escape it no matter where you run, for wherever you go you are burdened with yourself, and wherever you go, there you are.

Final Lesson of Book Two:

The life you have is the one you choose to endure.

Questions for Introspection:

- 1) Am I patient?
- 2) What does it mean to listen?

Book 3.

Chapter 2. That Truth Speaks Quietly To The Heart

Definition

They can indeed utter words, but they cannot convey the spirit of those words.

THE SCHEDULE (CONT.)

Chapter 3. That We Should Listen To God's Words With Deep Humility And Serious Intent

Stop

... for they have chosen not to listen.

Chapter 4. That We Ought to Live in Truth and Humility Before God

Fearless

You will truly be free, and you will be unconcerned about what others have to say.

Chapter 5. Of the Wonderful Effect of Divine Love Reciprocity

Love is never self-seeking, for when seek ourselves, we abandon love.

Week 7. BOOK THREE SELECTIONS CONTINUED: SUMMATION

Book 3.

Chapter 6. On The Proof Of A True Lover

Intimacy

Fight bravely, and if you sometimes fall through weakness, rise up again with greater strength than before, sure of my greater grace. Take care, too, to guard against self-satisfaction and pride.

Chapter 8. Of Humility Before God

Anatta (Buddhist concept of "not-self")

There in my nothingness, you show me to myself – what I am, what I have been, and what I have become.

Chapter 36. That You Should Not Worry About What Other People May Say About You

Reflection

Why should you be afraid of what others have to say? Today a person is, tomorrow s/he is gone? ... what can another person's words or shabby treatment do to you? Such people hurt themselves more than they hurt you.

Chapter 37. Of Gaining A Free Heart Through Total Self-Surrender

Power

Walk away from yourself – let go of yourself – and you will enjoy great inner peace. Give all for all, ask for nothing in return.

Chapter 58. Of Not Prying Into Things That Are Beyond Our Understanding

Focus

Do not ask why one person is so forsaken while another is raised up to such grace, or why one person is so badly, while another is so highly exalted.

Final Lesson of Book Three:

Understanding that praise does not make you holy and blame does not make you worthless creates peace through understanding that a compliment is just as meaningless as an unkind word.

Questions for Introspection:

1) What is confidence?

SUMMATION

Through an introduction to a 15th century classic, reimagined for a 21st century reader, we have come to understand the interconnectedness of grace, humility and gratitude as moving forces in our lives. These are the elements that make up the foundation of peace of mind and most important – freedom from the things and obstacles which inhibit living the lives we want.

As à Kempis writes:

My dear friend, you should aim diligently at this: that wherever you are and in whatever you do, you should be inwardly free and master yourself; all things should be subject to you, not you to them. You should be lord and master of your own actions, not a slave or a hired hand.