

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 1: Be Afraid

FEAR OF GOD

Always have the fear of God before your eyes (*Psalm 36: 21*) and avoid all thoughtlessness so that you are constantly mindful of everything God has commanded.

FEAR OF GOD IN THOUGHT:

“A monk should constantly keep in mind that all who despise God will burn in Hell for their sins, and that eternal life is prepared for those who fear Him.”

-chapter 7: Humility

HOMEWORK: Spare the life of a bug. Bonus points if it's a mosquito.

FEAR OF GOD IN WORD:

“Give up your own will, and take up the strong and most excellent weapons of obedience to do battle for Christ the Lord, the true King.”

-Prologue

|

HOMEWORK: Let someone less competent than you tell you what to do.

FEAR OF GOD IN DEED:

“Since idleness is the enemy of the soul, the brethren should be employed in manual labor at certain times. At other times, they should read spiritual books.”

-chapter 48: Work and Prayer

HOMEWORK: Secretly do someone else's chores.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 2: Don't be true to yourself.

SELF-DENIAL

Do not be in love with your own will, but put into practice the word of the Lord which says: "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." *(John 6: 38)*

SELF-DENIAL IN THOUGHT:

"Sarabites are the absolute worst kind of monks. Living without a shepherd, they invent their own monastery, which isn't even in the Lord's sheepfold but in their own. The gratification of their desires is their law because what they like they call holy, but what they happen to dislike they call unlawful."

-chapter 1: The Different Kinds of Monks

HOMEWORK: Skip the next episode of your favorite television show.

SELF-DENIAL IN WORD:

"If an older man asks to be received into the monastery, don't be too quick to accept him; if he persists in his request, let him know that he must keep the whole discipline of the Rule, and that nothing will be relaxed in his favor."

-chapter 60: Older Men who Ask to Join the Community

HOMEWORK: Let someone tell you a story you have already heard.

SELF-DENIAL IN DEED:

"Each monk should sleep fully clothed so that he will be ready to rise in the morning as soon as the bell rings. However, he should not wear his knife to bed or he might roll over and stab himself in his sleep. Moreover, the older monks should have their rooms near those of the younger ones. Thus they may gently encourage one another on the way to morning prayer, because sleepy monks like to make excuses."

-chapter 20: How the Monks Should Sleep

HOMEWORK: Make sure the last thing you read tonight before going to bed is Scripture

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 3: Don't follow your dreams.

OBEDIENCE

For the love of God, be obedient to those in authority over you, imitating the Lord, who became "obedient unto death." *(Phil 2: 8)*

OBEDIENCE IN THOUGHT:

"When a monk is told to do something, he will instantly quit his own work and, leaving unfinished whatever he was doing, set about what he is told with the ready step of obedience.

- chapter 5: Unhesitating Obedience

HOMEWORK: The next time you see something not done your way, leave it be if it works.

OBEDIENCE IN WORD:

"If the monks have been working in the fields or if the heat of the summer is great, lunch may have to be moved earlier. The abbot should arrange for a this so that whatever the brethren do, they may do it without having good reason to complain."

-chapter 41: Meal Times

HOMEWORK: At dinner tonight, serve yourself the crunchy heel of the bread, the blackest banana, the smallest piece of pizza, or whatever looks least appetizing on the table.

OBEDIENCE IN DEED:

"The brethren must be obedient not only to the abbot, but also to one another, knowing that this path of obedience is how they will reach God."

-chapter 71: Mutual Obedience

HOMEWORK: The next time someone treats you unfairly (cuts in line, lays loud music, eats something with your name on it in the fridge...) smile and thank God for him.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 4: Suffer fools gladly.

PERSEVERENCE

Be patient in suffering, even when you encounter difficulties and injustice, for Scripture says, "He who endures to the end will be saved." (*Mt 10:22*)

PERSEVERENCE IN THOUGHT:

"A monk should desire eternal life with all spiritual longing and keep the day of his death always before his eyes."

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Spend an entire day without correcting anyone.

PERSEVERENCE IN WORD:

"Above all, there should be no grumbling – not in word, not by gesture, not for any reason whatsoever. If anyone is caught grumbling, he should be severely disciplined."

-chapter 34: How Each Monk Should Be Treated

HOMEWORK: Keep you next opinion to yourself.

PERSEVERENCE IN DEED:

"The stability of our community is the workshop where we praise the spiritual art relentlessly day and night."

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Smile at someone who doesn't look like they're going to smile back.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 5: Put Your worst foot forward.

REPENTANCE

Never hide any of the evil thoughts which arise in your heart or the evils you commit in secret. Instead, reveal them to someone you trust. For Scripture says, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him." (*Psalm 37: 5*)

REPENTANCE IN THOUGHT:

"The monk should confess his sins to God daily in prayer with sighs and tears, and resolve to amend them for the future. Later, he should reveal those thoughts to a spiritual father."

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMework: Take the blame for a something you didn't do. (There will be an opportunity.)

REPENTANCE IN WORD:

"If anyone makes a serious mistake or misbehaves in some other way, let him tell a spiritual father who knows how to heal his own wounds, and not make public the faults of others."

-chapter 46: How to Fail

HOMework: Fix something you didn't break or clean something you didn't dirty.

REPENTANCE IN DEED:

"If a brother notices that one of his elder is angry, let him without delay cast himself down on the ground at his feet and beg for a blessing."

-chapter 71: Mutual Obedience

HOMework: Make no excuses the next time you are reprimanded.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 6: Be someone's doormat.

SERENITY

When ill treatment comes your way, try to accept it. Learn to be content with the lowliest and worst of everything, and in all that is demanded of you.

SERENITY IN THOUGHT:

“The abbot must never be excitable, anxious, obstinate, jealous, or suspicious. Such a person is never at rest.”

-chapter 64: How to Elect an Abbot

HOMEWORK: Laugh with someone who laughs at you.

SERENITY IN WORD:

“No community is without friction. Therefore the morning and evening prayers should never end without the Our Father. The superior himself should say it in front of everyone so that the brethren will be reminded of their promise when they say “forgive us as we forgive other.”

-chapter 13: Weekday Prayers

HOMEWORK: Deliberately walk (or drive) behind someone slow.

SERENITY IN DEED:

“A monk should not chase after pleasures.”

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Give up thirty minutes of television or video games, and read the Bible instead.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 7: Have a poor self-image.

SELF-ABASEMENT

Believe in your heart that you are an unworthy servant of God, humbling yourself and saying with the Prophet, "I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people." (*Psalm 22:6*)

SELF-ABASEMENT IN THOUGHT:

"As soon as evil thoughts come into your heart, dash them against Christ,"

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Thank God for something you are not good at.

SELF-ABASEMENT IN WORD:

"Do not desire to be called holy before you are; but be holy first, that you may be truly so called."

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Thank God for something you're good at.

SELF-ABASEMENT IN DEED:

"No one should be excused from kitchen duty, because this is how merit and charity are acquired. Also, the servers should wash the linens at the end of the week and do the Saturday cleaning. Both the outgoing and the incoming servers should wash the feet of all."

-chapter 35: Kitchen Duty

HOMEWORK: Clean a toilet.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 8: Think inside the box.

PRUDENCE

Only do what is lawful, and follow the example of your elders.

PRUDENCE IN THOUGHT:

“The monk should fulfill daily the commands of God by works; he should love chastity, and he should hate no one.”

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Think of a rule you don't like, and reword it in a positive way.

PRUDENCE IN WORD:

“If any monk, without the permission of the abbot, presumes to associate with an excommunicated brother in any way, let him be excommunicated as well.”

-chapter 26: Those Who Associate with the Excommunicated

HOMEWORK: Just say “thank you” the next time someone tells you something you already know.

PRUDENCE IN DEED:

“Choose a prudent man to be cellarer of the monastery – someone of settled habits, temperate and frugal. Above all, he should be humble, so that whenever he receives a request, he will answer with a kind word, for it is written: “Does not a word surpass a good gift?”

(Sirach 18: 17)

HOMEWORK: Clean up someone else's mess. Bonus points if it's on the floor.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 9: Don't speak up.

SILENCE

Only speak when you are spoken to, for Scripture says, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking." (*Proverbs 10: 19*)

SILENCE IN THOUGHT:

"Listen, my son, to the teachings of the master, and incline the ear of your heart."

-Prologue

HOMEWORK: Refrain from having the last word in your next conversation (even if it's friendly).

SILENCE IN WORD:

"Let us do what the Prophet says, "I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue" (Ps 39:1). Because silence is so precious, the monk should rarely speak even for good and holy reasons."

-chapter 6: Silence

HOMEWORK: Drive somewhere with the radio and the cell phone turned off.

SILENCE IN DEED:

"While the monks are eating, someone should read aloud from a book. In church at the start of the week, the reader should ask everyone to pray for him that God may ward off the spirit of pride."

-chapter 38: The Weekly Readers

HOMEWORK: The next time someone compliments you, give God the credit.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 10: Laughter is not the best medicine.

DIGNITY

Do not be too quick to laugh, for it is written, "A fool raises his voice when he laughs." (*Sirach 21: 20*)

DIGNITY IN THOUGHT:

"We believe that God is present everywhere and that the eyes of the Lord see the good and the bad in every place (Proverbs 15:3). Therefore, we should always keep in mind how we ought to behave in the sight of God and His angels, and let us so stand to sing, that our minds may be in harmony with our voices."

-chapter 19: The Practice of the Presence of God

HOMEWORK: Spend 30 minutes reading Thomas Aquinas' philosophical treatise on angels. It will blow your mind.

DIGNITY IN WORD:

"Guard your tongue against vulgar or wicked words, do not love excessive talking, watch how you joke around, and avoid unrestrained raucous laughter."

-chapter 4: The Tools of Good Works

HOMEWORK: Make someone smile without making them laugh.

DIGNITY IN DEED:

"We are reluctant to dictate the quantity of goods for others. However, allowing for the weakness of the sick, we think one hemina of wine per day should be sufficient for each because "wine makes even wise men act like fools."

(Sirach 19:2)

-chapter 40: Food and Drink

HOMEWORK: Spend an entire day without looking at a screen.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 11: Be unassertive.

DISCRETION

If you must speak, do so gently, humbly, earnestly, and quietly, with few and sensible words; for it is written: "The wise man is known by the fewness of his words."

DISCRETION IN THOUGHT:

"No monk should defend another in the monastery. Nor should he take sides in an argument because it causes very grave scandal. If anyone should violate this rule, let him be severely punished.

-chapter 69: Presuming to Defend a Brother

HOMEWORK: The next time someone annoys you, don't tell anyone.

DISCRETION IN WORD:

"Let the cellarer of the monastery be in charge of all the monastery goods. If a brother make a stupid request, the cellarer shouldn't sadden him with a cold refusal, but politely and humbly tell him no."

-chapter 31: The Cellarer

HOMEWORK: Find a point of agreement with someone who has a different opinion.

DISCRETION IN DEED:

"The extent of an excommunication should be determined by the seriousness of the offense as well as the prudence of the abbot. And it should continue until the disobedient monk has made satisfaction."

-chapter 24: Different Kinds of Excommunication

HOMEWORK: Let yourself be interrupted in a conversation and don't finish what you were going to say unless someone asks.

ST. BENEDICT'S LADDER OF HUMILITY

STEP 12: Keep your chin down.

REVERENCE

Wherever you go, bow your head in prayer, remembering the words of the publican:
“God, be merciful to me a sinner.” (*Luke 18: 13*)

REVERENCE IN THOUGHT:

“Even when a monk is away from his monastery, he should perform the Work of God in holy fear and on bended knee wherever he happens to be,”

-chapter 50: A Monk on a Trip

HOMEWORK: With reverence, say the name of Jesus twenty times today.

REVERENCE IN WORD:

“The monks should wake up even earlier on Sunday. After the usual prayers, the abbot should read a lesson from the Gospel, while the rest of the community stands in fear and trembling. If -God forbid – the brethren wake up late, some of the lessons or the responses may have to be shortened. When this happens, the monk at fault should make a public apology in the chapel.”

-chapter 11: Morning Prayer on Sundays

HOMEWORK: This Sunday, set an alarm to go off every thirty minutes. Whenever the alarm sounds, stop what you are doing and say an Our Father.

REVERENCE IN DEED:

“Nothing should be preferred to the Work of God. If a monk should arrive late for prayer, he should not stand in his usual place, but should take the lowest rank in choir. This way, perhaps he will be shamed into changing his behavior.”

-chapter 43: Tardiness

HOMEWORK: Arrive twenty minutes early for church this Sunday.