

The Good of Our Soul (Saint Isaac the Syrian)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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It takes a great struggle, because the passions are very powerful. But by God's grace those who are courageous and fight with all their strength will be victorious.

Bodily effort and study of the holy Scriptures preserve the purity of the mind. And then it needs a lot of prayer, so that divine grace will shelter those who are struggling. If we're to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit, it needs a great spiritual struggle, because we're easily led astray into wickedness, and, in the blink of an eye, lose what we've gained through great striving.

In our hearts there is good and evil. Which of the two will prevail depends on the effort we ourselves put in. If we give a free rein to our self, without trying to curb it, evil will prevail. On the other hand, if we strive, goodness and virtue will overcome.



This struggle is harsh. You'll fall and you'll get up again. Then you'll fall again and get up again. It's a life-long struggle. Because Satan doesn't leave us alone for

even a single moment. He's just waiting for a moment of inattentiveness, so that he can exploit it and do harm to our soul.

As we said above, the spiritual struggle requires humility. Because the Lord hears the prayers only of the humble. The prayer of the humble 'enters the ears of the Lord. The eyes of the Lord are on the humble of heart'. In a humble frame of mind, call upon the Lord and say to Him: 'Lord, my God, if You wish, You can illumine the darkness of my soul'.

When the soul's been warmed with love for God, it sees everything as worthless trash. Night and day it thinks of nothing other than Jesus Christ. Our contact with God is sweeter than the most wonderfully delicious food. When the soul's united with God, then the tears of spiritual joy flow. And these tears are with you whether you're eating, drinking, reading or praying, as the fruit of the soul's struggle. This is the reward God gives to those who work at His commandments, to those who've set the good of their soul as their aim in life.

So when you're visited by these tears, take courage and go forward with greater strength, so that you can cross over the sea of the passions. But be careful not to lose the spiritual treasure from your struggle, either through egotism or negligence.

If you haven't laboured at good works, you've no business talking about the virtues. Because any virtue that comes without effort is like an excrescence in the eyes of God. The sighing of your heart, prayers and vigils will help you acquire virtue. But no matter how you cry out in prayer to the Lord, He won't listen to you if you're not humble. Observation of the commandments and, above all, humility are what make us gods on earth. Faith and charity bring us to purity more quickly.

Those who have warm love for God are attracted by the good things to come. Those who are warmed with the hope of eternal benefits are free of worldly things. But reaching this exalted state requires great effort. And you have to start with the simple and easy things if you're going to get to the difficult ones. You have to attain the first rung on the ladder of the virtues, then go on to the next and so you'll slowly progress in the spiritual life.

You won't reach the heights by taking one great leap.

Let's first learn how to observe God's commandments and then, after many great efforts, God will send us His grace.

Happy are they who've chosen to tread the path of sorrows for the love of God, so long as they don't turn back. They'll quickly arrive at the harbour of the Kingdom of

Heaven. After their efforts and trials, they'll enjoy rest and recuperation. And they'll rejoice eternally, enjoying the good things which are to come.

Those who run the difficult way of virtue don't turn back, nor do they consider the difficulties they'll encounter, but they advance enthusiastically along the narrow, rough path, giving thanks to God, Who has enabled them to progress. But those who are afraid and make their way gradually and fearfully will never arrive at their destination and won't gain the crown of victory which Christ awards to those who strive in faith.

Idle people never make a start with repentance and constantly put it off. So when they arrive at the hour of their death, they're unprepared. If you want to progress in virtue, take no notice of the demands of the body, because the body's the enemy of the soul. Place your hope in God and tread the path of virtue in humility. You should know that, without God's help, you'll be poor and naked, deprived of all spiritual benefit. Don't be overcome by fear and anxiety during the struggle. If a farmer waits for the wind to drop before he starts sowing, he'll never get round to it. Better to die for the love of God than live in shame and idleness.

When you want to make a start on God's work, you must first abandon all hope and support in this life. Just as those who are preparing for death think about nothing other than this dread event, so those who wish to become united to God have to die to all the things of this world. Let me remind you: you'll come across obstacles, but don't lose hope.

Be strengthened by faith in God and by the thought that the things of this world are fleeting and vain, and that the greatest treasure is the Kingdom of heaven. God has prepared this for those who strive, not for idlers and malingerers. Start your efforts enthusiastically, not fearfully, because even the best task is useless if it's performed by people who are in two minds, one with God and the other with the things of this world. God wants all of us.

Be assured of your hope in Christ, so that your hard work isn't for nothing.

The Lord's merciful and gives His grace to those who demand it persistently. He gives His rewards not in accordance with the work we do but with the willingness we've shown. Do what you can for the salvation of your soul. Pray with tears, read the divine Scriptures, do works of charity. Just so long as you warm your soul with love for God.

Don't worry about the physical weakness of the body, in case you lose heart. Cast aside self-centredness, greed and egotism. Hate the works of the sinful flesh and

strive bravely to acquire virtue. And if, since you're human, you fall, well, you'll get up again. Don't return to your former sinful life. Always go forward joyfully and gladly to do the work of God and He will elevate you to the peak of the virtues.