

**Optional Study Suggestion for *The Art of Spiritual Living*,
Chapter 11, “Impersonalizing the Visible”**

In this chapter, Joel gives us a very powerful lesson on impersonalizing good. It is one of his most thorough and cogent explanations on this subject. Joel gets to the core of impersonalizing good when he says,

*“In thus impersonalizing good by not claiming it as of ourselves, we **open ourselves to an infinite capacity** to express good, an infinite capacity to express intelligence, wisdom, love, and life. The moment we claim anything for ourselves, we are necessarily limiting whatever it is we are claiming. When we acknowledge that we can of our own selves do nothing, we then make room for **infinite** good to be expressed through and as us.”*

In other words, by refraining from personalizing good, or refraining from believing that the good we do or the good we receive is the result of our personal capabilities and efforts, we can transcend the limited capacities of humanhood and become instruments for the **infinite** good of God. Just think of that—instruments for the **infinite** good of God!

We can read about impersonalizing good in this chapter, and we can think about how beautiful the idea is. But as Joel says so often, to make progress in spiritual living, we have to put the idea into practice. This chapter offers an opportunity for us to reflect and ask ourselves, “Am I impersonalizing good? How am I doing on that score?” Joel suggests several aspects to consider. He talks about impersonalizing wisdom, intelligence, forgiveness, grace, wealth, prayer, healing work, gratitude, and even the “Word of God,” or the impartations we receive in meditation.

We can take any of these and look at whether or not we are impersonalizing. “Am I impersonalizing wisdom and intelligence? Am I impersonalizing forgiveness? Am I impersonalizing wealth or supply? What about gratitude? What about ‘good deeds?’ What about prayer?” If we find areas in which we are personalizing, we can look to see what pulls us into personalizing.

For example, we might be susceptible to a human desire for personal credit, or for recognition, for acknowledgement, or for appreciation. If we feel resentful when someone else gets credit for an idea we had or for something that we said or did, that resentment could be a clue that we are personalizing. Or, we might be inclined to a subtle form of “spiritual arrogance,” believing that God has given us special spiritual experiences that would not be given to others. That could be another clue. We might notice that we enjoy a sense of personal pride in achieving a certain degree of health or of wealth. That pride might be something that pulls us into personalizing.

Sometimes we personalize simply out of habit or out of ignorance. For example, for years we may have been saying grace before meals in an attitude of gratitude for the food that is on *our* table; for what God has provided for *us*. Joel suggests that in order to impersonalize gratitude, our prayer should be one of gratitude for the Source of all food, and one of gratitude that food is provided for *all* of mankind. This shift from the personal to the impersonal, or to the universal, is a simple change to make once we see it.

Becoming aware of when we are personalizing gives us the chance to consider how we can move more in the direction of impersonalizing and come to know ourselves as instruments for the infinite good of God. Then we can allow the fullness of the “infinite storehouse of all good” to flow through us, and live from the impersonal altitude of “I live, yet not I; Christ lives my life,” and “I can of my own self do nothing; the Father within doeth the works.” And, even as we do this, we remember that this Christ, this Father within, this “infinite storehouse of all good,” is not something other than my Self. It is the mystical / of my being; the / that I truly am.