

## **Book Review: “Toolkit For Spiritual Growth: A Practical Guide to Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving”**



Author: Fr. Evan Armatas

Reviewed by Fr. Jim Kordaris

“My hope with this small book is to provide others with the same practical and simple direction I offer in person, which I pray will assist them also in their pursuit of God.” – Fr. Evan

Tuning in to Fr. Evan Armatas’s weekly call-in show, one is immediately struck by its pace and relaxed, conversational tone. We are conditioned by our short attention span to expect quick and easy answers to difficult questions. Fr. Evan’s talent is to take each question or comment, thoughtfully and pastorally transforming it into a teaching opportunity applicable to the lives of most listeners.

In the same manner, Toolkit for Spiritual Growth offers specific details on basic steps to growth in faith through Jesus Christ’s teachings on Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. These three components are described by Fr. Evan as “the basis for

our spiritual life as Christians.” This straightforward volume puts into print Fr. Evan’s natural ability to present the Orthodox Christian Faith in simple, understandable terms. For those born into the faith, those that have chosen to be Orthodox and those that are considering becoming Orthodox, this excellent book provides readers with practical guidance on their spiritual journey.

So often, we make issues of faith overly complicated. In the abundance of excellent writing on the Orthodox Christian faith, we can become like the centipede unable to take the first step because it can’t decide which leg goes first. This book provides the essentials for growth in the faith. There is always more to learn on any subject concerning the faith, and Fr. Evan references many other resources available to go as deep as the reader may wish.

In a foreword written nearly forty years ago, Fr. Stanley Harakas wrote of a book by his friend, Fr. Anthony Coniaris, “...the reader will find this volume refreshing, interesting, authentic, contemporary, down to earth and practical....” With Toolkit for Spiritual Growth, Fr. Armatas builds on the work of Fathers Harakas and Coniaris with a focus on three critical components of the faith: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

On the subject of prayer, Fr. Evan explains the why, what and how of personal prayer. He stresses the importance of prescribed or liturgical prayers and the need for a designated place of prayer in our home, and that private prayer is part of the “larger rhythm of going to church.”

Regarding almsgiving, we read in the Toolkit for Spiritual Growth that righteousness and mercy require heartfelt concern for others. In this context, almsgiving and charity are acts of love that are shared and lead to healing. Fr. Evan examines the word in scripture, *splanchnizomai*, that is often translated as “compassion.” He explains that this translation omits the physical implication of the Greek, which is best translated “to feel in one’s guts.” This is the feeling that leads us to true acts of charity and almsgiving.

The spiritual discipline of fasting is presented as a training tool to more fully comprehend the “connection between our physical and spiritual selves.” To overcome certain sinful desires it is often helpful to practice fasting, realizing that “fasting and our struggle with sin are intimately connected.”

Fr. Evan’s Toolkit for Spiritual Growth is a book suitable for individual study, catechism for adults and prospective new members, adult book study groups, teen Sunday school classes, camp discussions and more. The pastoral tone and practical

manner with which these essential concepts are presented makes for an engaging read.

With his Toolkit for Spiritual Growth, Father Evan Armatas succeeds in providing a guide that will assist others in their pursuit of God.

Purchase the book here: <https://www.amazon.com/Toolkit-Spiritual-Growth-Practical-Almsgiving-ebook/dp/B08GYHVMQM>

Fr Jim Kordaris serves the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese as Director of Stewardship, Outreach & Evangelism and leads the parish of Saint George in Kingston, NY.

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