

The Interior Castle Study Guide

The Interior Castle by Teresa of Ávila

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Plot Summary

St. Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* was written in obedience to an assignment given her by the spiritual leaders in her monastic order, and was completed in 1577. It was to be a work on the subject of prayer, and throughout the book, Teresa talks about how intimidated she is to be writing on such an expansive topic. She is, however, given a vision of how such a thing might be explained, and so uses the analogy of a castle to describe the depths of intimacy with God that the human spirit passes through over a lifetime dedicated to prayer and contemplation. There are seven levels, referred to as dwellings, each one closer to the heart of God and further from attachment to the things of this world, each one involving both blessing and struggle.

The first dwelling is the one in which the individual first recognizes there is a castle to be explored and enters its doors by beginning prayer and self-examination. She describes the value of moving beyond rote, prescribed prayers written by other people and beginning a soul-revealing conversation with one's Creator. She also talks about how much the temptations of the world, described as serpents and reptiles, can still easily distract a soul in this very exterior place. She emphasizes, however, how important it is the soul remember how worthwhile getting through into the rest of the castle is, and so encourages perseverance through this temptation-riddled exploration.

The second dwelling differs from the first in that, while the soul is in deaf and dumb observation in the first dwelling, in the second she (as she refers to all souls, since she is addressing her sisters in the convent) is able to recognize the calling voice of God. It is not an audible call until much later, but comes through words spoken by teachers, friends, or that come in study. Along with the sharpening of the intellect that comes with this increased understanding, however, come vicious attacks from the enemy of souls to try to deceive and pull back into the world a soul who is beginning to find wisdom beyond it. She sites surrender to the will and calling of God as the only defense against those attacks.

The third dwelling is the one in which the soul must move beyond listening and understanding to doing, bringing the will into submission to the things she has seen will lead her into the likeness of her God. She stresses the importance of humility, as well, since human nature is so much more likely to work for recognition than purely out of selfless love and a desire to serve God. This is when the soul must battle how she feels and what she wants and train herself as a faithful servant willing to serve unnoticed. Remembering that every bit of progress and refinement which occurs in one's soul is the work of God and not the individual is another major lesson to be learned in this dwelling.

The fourth dwelling is when the soul begins to experience the supernatural. Being ever closer to the dwelling of the King, she says there are more and more beautiful things to see and understand, among them, what Teresa calls "consolations in prayer." These are gifts of joy given by God completely unrelated to things in this world, and they serve to expand the heart's capacity for joy, making them an incredibly valuable gift. This is also



the dwelling in which Teresa places the "Prayer of Quiet", when the soul sits without speaking in the presence of God and listens for Him to speak, and the "Prayer of Recollection" when the soul remembers and rebuilds the place where it can go to pray, and retakes control from the senses.

The fifth dwelling is where the soul experiences the "Prayer of Union," a state in which the soul is completely withdrawn from the senses and is in removed union with the Creator. In this communion, the spirits and temptations of evil have no ability to distract or harm the soul. The soul is taught to recognize truth and goodness when it encounters it, and the appetite is refined to crave those things exclusively. She describes this process as replacing "false intelligence with true wisdom". Here she also introduces the analogy of the silkworm that she carries through the end of the book and says that in this stage, the silkworm builds the house in which it will die, that being Christ, the character to which she will give herself up to become like.

The sixth dwelling is when the soul really begins to ache with desire to be with her Creator and leave behind the world and its sad inconsideration of its God. She is wounded whenever she sees people out of communion with him and aches to be absorbed in worship all the time. She also recognizes more and more how imperfectly she is able to serve Him, and this wounds her deeply, as well. Teresa urges the practitioner experiencing this state still to strive to serve and improve the whole of her life in order to pass through this final trial improved by it.

The final dwelling is the one in which the soul finally wishes for infinite life so that she can serve her God forever. Suffering on earth is finally a pleasure, and is recognized as trifling compared with the suffering Christ did in giving up His royalty to live poor and die for His beloveds. She is so absorbed in the beauty of God that she looks eagerly for ways to serve Him, work she can do and secret ways of loving Him with her actions. The butterfly has died of happiness and has found her rest in the presence of her King.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

In St. Teresa's Prologue to *The Interior Castle*, she addresses her sisters at the convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to explain the assignment that has been given her. She expresses a desire to be obedient, but nonetheless both feels unworthy of such an important assignment, not being very educated, and worries that whatever she might have to say on such a subject she must certainly have already said in previous writings. She admits, however, that whenever she has admitted her fear and weakness to God in the past, He has made impossible things easy and pleasurable. So she will supplicate herself to Him again and allow Him to do the work through her.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1 begins with her explanation that a vision was granted her of how this book might be presented. She compares the human soul to a castle of diamond or crystal and says it is filled with dwellings in every direction, but at its center is the dwelling place of God our Creator, and He waits there for us to draw close to Him and commune with Him. She also compares the human soul to a garden in which God takes great delight as a thing of beauty. She points out it was created in the image of God Himself and so is not to be understood, but treasured and protected as a thing of incredible worth.

Teresa stresses the value of knowing oneself in this first chapter and of being as grateful for the blessings we observe in other people as we are for those we see in ourselves. This humble gratitude is the first virtue she discusses. Her invitation in this chapter is for the soul to enter into prayer and begin the quest to know herself. She uses an analogy given her by a wise man who says that a person who does not pray is like a person whose limbs are paralyzed. While he has hands and feet, he cannot command them. She likens that analogy to that of the castle and says that a person who has been dealing with the vile, poisonous creatures who dwell outside the castle for such a long time becomes like them, and that unless they strive by communion with their Creator to retrain themselves for their original purpose, they will be lost to the world.

She points out that the first step in allowing prayer to be transformative is to accompany sincerely spoken prayer with self-examination, rather than repeating memorized prayers mindlessly. She describes praying to God as if He were a servant, saying whatever comes to mind and says that such a practice is not prayer at all and will yield no good. These prayers are shot up a few times a month from a mind still wrapped up in worldly appetites and from hearts whose treasures are still on earth, so the hearts of such people are still there also. She says that until a person is determined to turn their attention away from the world, those prayers will remain ineffective.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 opens with Teresa pointing out that a soul who has entered into this process and turns away is "in a state of grave error" and is in the deepest darkness. She has stepped out of the castle and so is no longer able to radiate the light coming from God at its center. All her works will be fruitless, since they can no longer be motivated by the love coming to her from God. Works done outside of communion with God are motivated by a spirit of evil and a desire to glorify the individual rather than God, and so will yield no lasting good. She uses the analogy of a tree previously planted by a clear spring of water that pulls up its roots and replants them in a muddy, smelly bog. The fruit the tree will bear in that new location cannot possibly be as good, her shade not nearly as comforting as it had previously been.

She warns heartily against allowing this state, likening it to throwing a shroud over a brightly shining jewel. She pleads that the souls in this state have compassion for themselves and as soon as they are aware of their error to right it and continue on the path to pure prayer and self-awareness. She laments at how sad it would be for a person to leave this life without ever having enjoyed this light and says how disturbed would be that soul's faculties of sense and reason. She says the real travesties done in this state are not the things that soul does, but what it does not do.

Next she describes a woman who experienced this state and, upon discovering the fruitlessness of works done in unconsciousness of God, prayed that God never let her return to that state again. She also said that God gave her the gift of a mirror that would allow her to see that none of the good works she did had their source in her, but were instead motivated by God, so that she would remain a humble conduit of His love. The result was that whenever she did a good work, she would immediately start praising God and not give a second thought to herself.

From there Teresa turns back to the analogy of the castle and likens it to a palmetto fruit. There is vast spaciousness in the outer layers before the sweetness in the middle. So, when one prays, one should explore all of the space in the dwelling instead of staying always in the same familiar corner. If the soul is a spacious, expansive thing, then we will know it best by moving freely throughout its rooms, praying and serving in different ways, for different things, at different times and with different motivations.

Humility is stressed here as an important tool for self-knowledge, because one only sees oneself rightly as compared with the character of God, and so, like a bee flying from one flower to the next, Teresa urges the student to move frequently from the study of God to the study of self, so that she may recognize those areas she needs to bring before Him to be remade in His image. She notes that it is easiest to see things when they are seen in contrast, like black against white. By seeing the perfect Image, one can more clearly recognize what is still flawed in herself. She returns to the analogy of the



clearly running stream and cites fear and faintheartedness as the things that will impede its flow.

This leads Teresa to cautioning against fearful humility as an extreme to be equally cautioned against. When a student is overly aware of her deficiency to the point that she views it as unworthy of divine help, she disqualifies herself in her own mind and dams up the stream God intends to send flowing through her. This is as dangerous, in Teresa's observation, as haughty self-aggrandizement leading to working outside the strength of God. Either extreme fixes the eyes of the soul on the self instead of on God and both are a distraction. She urges the student to fix the eyes on God and leave them there, as that is when understanding is enhanced.

Next Teresa cautions the soul about the proximity in which it exists to the pleasures and ambitions of the world outside of God, and how badly the spirits of evil want to deceive her into turning her attention back to the world and away from God. She encourages the soul to move closer and close to God with her attention fixed on Him rather than on herself as she moves from room to room, from practice to practice, since those are the times when she is most vulnerable to temptation. She urges the student to continuously pray for strength and intervention, since a student of her own nature lacks the ability to defend herself. The greatest enemy in these rooms is attachment to and seeking after the things of the world instead of the things of God.

The final caution she offers is against using this new knowledge of self and God to accuse fellow seekers and allow damage to friendships. Love is a virtue to be zealously protected, and the more it can be kept, the closer to perfection the soul who has kept it will come. She says losing love and become accusatory unnecessarily ruins ones own serenity and the peace of mind of the accused. She even mentions that spiritual advisors can be led astray by this temptation and that that is even more dangerous. Since she is writing to her sisters, she urges that matters be discussed quietly and personally, and only after that, discretely taken to a higher teacher. Everything a soul does must be motivated by love.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

The third chapter, discussing the Second Dwelling, opens with a discussion of the distinction between the first and second dwellings. In the first dwelling, Teresa explains, the soul is both deaf and dumb, and is only just beginning to learn to pray. In the second, she is more aware of the temptations that will pull her away and of the good thing it is to turn away from those things. That knowledge, however, comes at the price of leaving behind the simpler first level and entering into a place much harder to navigate.

In the Second Dwelling, the soul is able to distinguish God's voice from the many voices vying for her attention, but is tormented by her lack of ability to carry out what He requests, still being so young and incomplete in her faith. She is still battling with all manner of distractions and temptations, and has to tune deliberately in to the voice of her Master calling her closer. His voice uses the vehicles of friends' words, teaching and spiritual literature, but is still not audible as its own voice at this point in the journey.

Here, Teresa sites perseverance as the virtue to be cultivated, as the sign of assurance to God that it is the student's intention to draw ever closer to Him, and what will encourage Him to continue calling. The temptations leveled at such a soul will include glorification of the things the world has to offer and accusations that the manner of self-sacrifice she has been willing to undertake is unhealthy and too painful to endure. Seemingly virtuous worldly alternatives will be offered. Here one's intellect must be the voice more trusted than the impulsive feelings of doubt. She must remember that no joy the world can offer her will be lasting, and that she is on a journey that will lead her to the wholeness of what she was created to be. Neither security nor peace can be found outside the castle. One must trust what she knows more than what she sees.

Teresa here includes a conversation with God in which she implores Him that the seeker remember to keep good company: worldly company will create worldly desires in the soul, and the company of those who have walked the road to God before her will encourage her to remain steadfast. Her mind must also remain free of desire for self-aggrandizement, which will be a foundation of sand for her house of prayer. She must also battle the temptation to complain about what Teresa calls "spiritual aridity", or dry times when proceeding faithfully is more work than gratification. She encourages the seeker instead to remember the suffering and solitude of Christ when He walked on earth, and to willingly undertake whatever suffering might allow her to enter into fellowship with her Lord.

Teresa discusses the foolishness of some who insist that if God would just give them some kind of spiritual favor, they would be able to endure much more spiritual suffering. She challenges that thinking by pointing out that God neither requests nor requires a human's insight into what she thinks she needs, that her perspective is exponentially



more limited than His, and her motivations for asking almost definitely less noble than would be His for giving certain favors. She says that the entire goal in this process is to sincerely devote oneself to prayer and remain humbly intent on surrendering one's character to the hand and will of God.

Next she warns against spiritual affectations: putting on a show of one's spirituality with esoteric jargon and dabbling with things above one's head. She points out that at times it is God's will that a seeker experience spiritual dryness, so to endure it with as much patience and intention to learn as when in any other state. She says God pulls good out of hard experiences as well as joyful ones. She urges peace in the process, understanding that every element carries wisdom. A seeker must trust God's mercy more than her own judgment.

Warning against the temptation of turning away from the journey in discouragement at its difficulty, Teresa warns that to do so would mean losing more and more of oneself daily, making it necessary to start again from the beginning if ever the seeker did wish to continue. She calls it foolish to think one could ever enter Heaven without first entering herself and making preparations. She closes this first chapter quoting Jesus' words that no one would come to the Father except through Him, and wonders how, on looking at Him, a soul could remain unmoved to do good works. She says that faith without works is dead, and works without the love of God are futile.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

The first chapter discussing the Third Dwelling opens with Teresa noting that those who have passed through to this place are already on their way to security unless they turn away. She prays and tells God that the only hope is in spending this life absorbed in serving God, or in wishing to die and be taken directly to Him. She begins, getting bogged down along the way in apologizing for what she sees as unworthiness to write on the topic, but finally working her way around to discussing the main occupations of those in the Third Dwelling. The first she discusses is retaining one's awe of God. She points out King David, once a giant of faith, who traded his awe of God for awe of a woman and the consequences even reached his son, Solomon.

The next occupation she discusses is that of moving from a devotional life to a life of real and tangible service and sacrifice. She points to the example of the wealthy young ruler who came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to enter the kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus said he had to give up all of his wealth and follow Him, the young man went away sad. She notes how sad it would be indeed if, when a seeker is finally asked to follow through with her faith and give up those things she depended on before, she turned away from God sad, unwilling to make her faith real. She compares that young man to practitioners who strive to live admirably, never offending and cultivating the virtues in themselves earnestly. She merely points out that even on earth, a king might have many servants, but not all of them are allowed into his private chamber. She encourages the seeker to continue to press in, even when the price is high, that works will be so much more powerful when they are done in harmony with the love of Christ.

As in so many other instances, Teresa stresses humility as being highly valuable as one moves through this stage. If God tells a soul what is necessary to achieve perfection, and she walks away unwilling, then there is no sympathizing with her sadness. She has thought herself more wise than God, and has not been willing to receive what He has said was rightfully hers. She says God blesses the soul in proportion to the love that soul offers Him. Actions are the proof of a soul's love, so when action is refused, so is the blessing.

Addressing the opposite extreme, she warns against making elaborate sacrifices and then feeling entitled to extravagant spiritual blessing. Even if a human gives up all she has, God is under no obligation to give her whatever she might be expecting. He still remains the sovereign Ruler, and one should serve Him out of whole-hearted love instead of a desire for blessing. She closes the chapter reiterating that humility will yield the peace that comes from being aligned with the will of God, and deeper tranquility will yield deeper contentment. The only thing for which the soul should strive is intimacy and humble subjectivity to God's will.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

In the second and last chapter on the third dwelling, Teresa describes souls she has known who have come to the point in their spiritual maturity when they are tempted to rest in their own virtue and strength and God tests them in order to right their perspectives on their own strength and their dependence on Him. The instances she describes are the ones in which the soul being tested reacts dramatically out of proportion to what is necessary to endure the trial. They mope and sigh and put on a show of their distress, and she comments that there is little anyone can say to reason with a person who has reacted in this way.

She points out that a soul rightly handling this trial would quickly recognize in which categories their attachments were still too entwined with temporary earthly things and that recognition would be more painful to them than the duress which made them see it. They would adjust their perspective, and the lesson would be learned. In some cases, however, the person experiencing the trial magnifies and touts their tribulation and wants to be lauded as a valiant sufferer. She says the wiser course, and the more expedient path to wisdom, is to be continuously reflecting on one's own character so such trials are rendered unnecessary before they come.

Here Teresa uses two analogies to clarify her point. In the first, there is a rich man who loses everything but what he needs to feed only his own family. Rather than his fretting he no longer has enough to feed the poor around him, he ought simply to understand God is teaching him with his poverty to maintain his peace and faith that God continues to work wisely for his good. In the second, there is a wealthy man who has the opportunity to gain more wealth. She says that is certainly a good thing, provided the man's intention is virtuous and points out that if it is, striving will not be necessary.

She draws a simile between these people and souls who are confronted with the possibility of losing their reputations. God will maintain his intention for their betterment, and so will equip them to handle the circumstance with dignity and virtue, because public virtue from His children is certainly what He wants. Knowing this to be true, it is silly for the soul to allow themselves to worry and get worked up, because God will certainly use this, like any other circumstance for their good. She points out that the greatest danger here is for the soul to presume their suffering is due to other people's faults and forget they once thought it a noble and admirable thing to suffer for the good of their King.

Here she comes to the main lesson to be learned in this phase of the Third Dwelling: to make sure the learning soul is truly detached from those things it recognizes the need to leave behind. Gaining mastery over one's cravings means turning one's will over to the will of the Refiner and surrendering to God even in one's favorite appetites. She comments particularly on the ascetic practices of those in her convent and implores that



they be modestly, humbly and discretely practiced, mindful of one's health, so they are done for God's observation instead of for man's.

At the same time she urges modesty, however, she laments that the human soul is so commonly satisfied with baby steps toward holiness, wanting always to be very comfortable at every stage. She wonders, if the journey could be made in less time, would not that be the preferred way? Urging determination for the end of the journey, she urges her sisters not to rely on others to make the progress for them, but to exert themselves for love of the Beloved. Even to the extent that they leave their physical health to those around them, she urges self-sacrificing single-mindedness in finishing their journey to perfect and intimate communion with God.

The means Teresa recommends for moving quickly through this phase of testing is to remain humble, allowing changes to take place. Otherwise, the suffering experienced will continue on for years, and suffering elaborately will be the only skill which develops in the soul being tried.

Here Teresa notes that the "spiritual sweetness" resulting from humbly moving through this phase is much greater reward than merely existing among the trivialities of mundane life, and describes the distinction between "spiritual sweetness" and "spiritual consolations." Sweetness, as described by Teresa, is the quiet satisfaction that one's actions have been motivated by love and have pleased her King, while consolations are the ordinary gratifications of being outwardly praised but the lack of humility brings an inner bitterness one will likely be unable to explain. Explaining her hesitancy to write about such things, she points out that she was late in learning the beauty and value of this sweetness. One who is humble from early in her journey can expect much more sweetness and motivation to praise Him as a result. This sign of love from God fortifies the soul to serve with greater fervor, moving her closer to God more quickly.

As an aid in learning to be responsive to God's will in this phase, Teresa recommends seeking the council of someone who does not share one's illusions and has been able to more easily attain the state for which the seeking soul is striving. She also warns about the ability to be comforted and tempted away by the world, being still so close to the First Dwelling. She cautions for this reason to choose an advisor more immune to those temptations. She cautions with equal fervor, however, not to dwell on the imperfections of others, but to learn the lessons every life has to teach. This is better than allowing oneself to be easily shocked at the contrast and miss the lessons. She closes by reminding spiritual students to live in silence and hope.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

The sixth chapter of the book opens Teresa's exploration of the Fourth Dwelling, beginning with her noting it is in this stage that the soul begins to experience the supernatural. Being nearer to the place where the King lives, these deeper dwellings are more and more beautiful, and the poisonous creatures that hound the believer in the more exterior dwellings very rarely gain access to these deeper ones. When they do, she explains that keeping one's battle skills sharp is a useful endeavor, and continues to remind the soul she is growing instead of stagnating.

Returning to her discussion of the distinction between spiritual sweetness and consolations, Teresa explains that consolations can be gotten from purely human endeavors and are merely the natural result in a person of doing a good or admirable thing. She says spiritual sweetness has its beginning in God and is bestowed on people, whereas spiritual consolations, or comforts, begin with human actions that find their way to God. Of the two, she says spiritual sweetness is far more uplifting than the latter.

Spiritual sweetness, she explains, actually has the ability, serves the purpose in fact, of expanding the heart's capacity for it, as well as for God and for love. In the first three dwellings, seekers are much more likely to "apply the discursive mind" to their quest for intimacy with God, and so limit themselves to what can be understood and observed in that capacity. As intimacy grows deeper, however, experiences of God become much less quantifiable and much more other-worldly, and so are experienced in a part of the soul to which the intellect has to access.

She explains that to press on to this level of intimacy with God, the important thing is not "to think much but to love much," loving in its truest sense, so that one's priority is entirely outwardly focused. When one is loving God, her priority should be on his glorification and service, regardless of its effect on her own happiness or glory. In supplement to thinking, Teresa explains mindfulness as its superior alternative. Mindfulness allows for peaceful resting on and contemplation of the person and love of God while thoughts are scattered and much less in her control. She explains that while some recognize their inability to quiet and reign in their thoughts, the better way is to keep the soul, the mind, quietly resting in God and to allow the thoughts to remain in the outer dwellings, doing battle with the distractions among which everyone must live. Communion with God never need be broken, and the thoughts never need to be unified behind the cause for that communion to be genuine and beneficial.

Next Teresa talks about the condition of her own literal head as she works on this assignment. She describes sounds she hears continuously and it leads her to explaining that when the faculties are forced to come along with the soul into regions to which they are not suited, it hurts. When the faculties can be left behind and the soul



allowed to explore and experience unencumbered, there is no pain until the faculties are re-engaged. The key is to understand that if the thoughts that serve as distractions are from a spirit of evil, they will pass. If they are a part of the human legacy from Adam, rather than fighting them, it is better just to observe them and patiently endure them as a trial intended to strengthen the soul. The constant occupation of the soul should remain, however, to rise above them into peaceful trust in God and to stop blaming the soul for the symptoms of "a weak imagination, human nature, and the spirit of evil".



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

The next chapter begins with a discussion Teresa touched on earlier. She had been discussing the physical effects of spiritual consolations, like fits of sobbing and fidgety limbs and says that while she has never experienced such things, she is sure they must be very comforting, as they are manifestations of having basked in the presence of God. Spiritual sweetness, she explains, is quite different.

She begins with the metaphor of water, an element she has spent a good deal of time contemplating. In the case of consolations, water reaches the basin that collects it after following a complicated and carefully engineered collection of conduits. In the case of sweetness, the source of the water is just next to the collecting basin, and it fills it so abundantly, that the water streams out of the basin and forms a continuously bubbling spring. She follows this metaphor with that of a fragrance that originates deep in the soul, like sweet perfume being heated over coals, until the soul becomes quietly and contentedly aware of it enough to enjoy it and be cheered by it as it moves through life. Rather than the actions that result from living in this knowledge, however, Teresa explains that the true test of the soul's capacity as a vessel is both in recognizing what the sweetness is, and in not turning away from it. Allowing the soul to stay in that knowledge is an incredible favor granted by God.

She explains that any blessing given the soul has been granted by God, and so humility remains the most important quality of someone wishing to move deeper. The seeker will know if she has remained humble if she sits and names the virtues manifesting in her, or has her attention so fixed on her Creator that she imagines neither that she has the virtues nor that she will ever have them. She is just transfixed on the beauty of her Lord. Not striving to receive anything in return for one's actions is the key. She explains with five points: love for God should be more motivation than self-interest, a feeling of entitlement is evidence of a lack of humility, sharing in the Savior's suffering should be more motivation than receiving consolations for doing so, God will never grant something the soul is not ready to receive so serving for selfless love of God is the only worthy course, and finally, striving only sets up more conduits for the flow of water to traverse, so striving becomes its own obstacle to receiving spiritual sweetness.

She closes the chapter by reminding her sisters that they are God's, and they should free Him to do whatever He pleases. Truly detaching oneself from results and remaining humble, even more powerfully than convincing oneself she is humble and being wrong, opens the spring waiting above the vessel to flood it with sweetness to be enjoyed in the innermost places.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

The third and final chapter on the Third Dwelling opens with an explanation of the Prayer of Recollection. She describes it as the state in which the soul retreats from the senses and begins to rebuild the temple where it can go to worship. She refers to it as something that was lost and is being remembered. She describes the process by asking the reader to imagine that the soul has gone outside the castle and has been spending enough time outside it that it has picked up habits. When it remembers the beautiful place it has left, it turns back to the castle and has to shed all of the habits it has developed. When the King recognizes that the desire to return is here, He calls the soul back into communion with Him, and the old habits fall away as the soul draws closer in.

Here she draws the important distinction between deliberate visualization of God's living inside a soul and God's granting the favor of reconciliation. The true revelation of God's indwelling a person is much more transformative than the practice, while still a beneficial meditation, of imagining Him there. She says it is like a turtle drawing back into its shell, only the soul has been called there by Someone distinct from herself. She offers the encouragement that if a soul longs for this level of intimacy with its Creator, He will grant her this and continue to call her higher. Then, rather than the soul trying to talk to God, she learns to listen quietly and be taught by Him.

Next Teresa returns to her discussion about why it is not necessary to try to curb thought in meditation or prayer. She makes the point that it is best for a beggar who comes before a King to lower her head and remain silent, just grateful she is allowed to be near Him. If, however, in waiting she is tempted to engage her mind, it is not only wrong to do so, but trying to do so will inevitably hopelessly stimulate the imagination. She should instead steer her thoughts and direct them to prayer, training them after the desire of her soul to be near her King. The second reason she gives not to try to stop one's thoughts is that it is painful rather than helpful, like holding one's breath, and so will be a distraction rather than an aid. Minds were created to think, and so they should be trained to actively surrender the soul into the wise and loving hands of God. Finally, obsessively trying to quiet the mind is only stealing the focus from God and fixing it on the thoughts, and so is counterproductive to the whole exercise of meditating on Him. When God desires the mind to be quiet, He will fix it on something that will occupy it, and until then it remains free to do its appointed task. The stream she refers to in the last chapter opens as a gift, allowing the mind to rest. Forcing the mind to rest is the kind of effort that will complicate the route the water must take.

She describes the signs that the Prayer of Quiet, the state that allows the spiritual sweetness she described in the previous chapter, is affecting the soul. She says the soul will recognize that its capacity for receiving sweetness, or water from the spring, grows. Her capacity to serve joyfully without fear of offending God or falling short in some way increases and she becomes more certain that she will find perfect delight in



serving Him without giving thought to herself or what she might suffer. Suffering itself becomes a sweet offering she can give to God, and so she bears it with gratitude. In the same way, earthly pleasures become to her like garbage, and she is much more able to master her appetites as a result. As long as she is able to maintain focus on God as the subject and object of her devotion, she will be safe from falling away.

Teresa warns, however, that even when God has granted these favors, the danger still remains of the soul losing her focus and turning back to the outer dwellings. She uses the analogy of a baby not yet ready to be weaned from her mother's breasts. If she did turn away, there would be nothing for her to do but starve. Having seen souls turn away and observed with what determination the spirit of evil pulls them away from the divine to ensure they never return, she cautions her sisters, appealing to what she is sure is their mutual desire that none of them lose their intimacy with God.

Referring to another response to this spiritual state, Teresa describes sisters who are so engrossed in their own reaction to what is happening in their souls that they focus on the reaction at the expense of their health. They swoon and starve and make themselves a distraction both to themselves and to the practitioners around them. She calls it foolishness and discourages this as self-absorption. Teresa uses these examples to teach that when a spiritual experience causes suspension of the senses, instead of lingering, it passes all too quickly. When one experiences such a state and recognizes she might be tempted to try to hold on to it, she should find something fun to do to stimulate her back into the maintenance of her own health.

She closes this discussion and that of the Third Dwelling by warning if it seems contemplation sweeps her away into neglect of her health that it might not be the lifestyle for her. Instead, humble service is the path she recommends for someone tempted by neglectful absorption.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

The discussion of the Fifth Dwelling introduces the reader to the concept of the Prayer of Union. Teresa describes it as the state in which one is so deeply in the presence of God that she is removed from her senses and reason. She dies to her own desires in complete absorption in worship and unity with God. Even if the mind were to try to understand the experience she was having, it would not be able to grasp it in any kind of useful way, so it remains stunned and removed from the experience. Nonetheless, she acknowledges a skepticism that remains in the mind about the reality and sacredness of such a foreign experience and calls it a good and healthy thing. It is still possible in the early rooms of the Fifth Dwelling for the soul to be deceived, so she must test the spirits and be sure that the fruit the experience bears are good and godly.

Eventually, the Fifth Dwelling ushers the soul far enough away from temptations that the spirit of evil no longer has access to the soul. At that level of intimacy with God, the intimacy is so complete and effects such a change that the soul leaving the Prayer of Union can be in no doubt that she was in God and He was in her. She talks about the men of learning with incomplete spiritual experiences who might question such an experience. While she advises her sisters continue to confide in their leaders, it is the knowledge left with certainty in their souls and not the confirmation of what she calls half-learned men that will confirm the experience's reality.

Her discussion of this phase closes with the example of the bride in the Song of Solomon who was led into the wine cellar by her groom. She did not go on her own leading, but he led her there, just the way God leads the soul seeking Him into the places He wants to teach her.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Teresa's second chapter on the Fifth Dwelling introduces a metaphor she carries through to the end of the book. She begins by describing the way a silk worm tirelessly works for the benefit of people, and eventually gives up its life to that service. She invites long and deliberate meditation on the beauty of that life and sacrifice. Then she draws an analogy to the soul, citing the rituals of worship, literature and teaching as the food the young soul strengthens itself with, until it is fully developed and starts to build the house in which it will die. The house is Christ, and He is the cause and personality to which the believer gives herself up, and the house in which the believer will die to herself and her own desires. It is only when the silkworm dies that the butterfly emerges, and so this should be a death the believer seeks ardently.

Once the soul has died to its own desires, her desires are so engrossed in the things of God that she desires passionately to endure any trial for Him, to spend long hours worshipping Him, and to do everything she can to keep Him from being dishonored in any way. In her newfound peaceful unity with God, the butterfly is now as restless as ever, never giving thought to the work she used to do as a worm and dissatisfied with every earthly pleasure. No amount of serving Him seems enough, and the obligations to keep her earthly world orderly seem like tedious trivialities to her. Teresa spends quite a bit of time describing the anguishes that accompany this state. The soul now freed from her selfish desires is still distracted by the comparison of the ideal she recognizes and the ways she sees herself and the world around her falling short. As a result, she is pained in every moment but not able to make real what she recognizes is the better way.

It is in this state of longing to be used by God that the soul surrenders itself enough that God can give her the gift of charity. Like wax has only to remain warm and soft to have a seal imprinted in it, the soul has only to remain willing and receptive, and God will shape her into a selfless lover. Here, the suffering the soul does for God is itself a comfort, because the soul knows she is a useful tool in the hands of God, just as Jesus knew that his suffering brought reconciliation between His Father and His children.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

The third chapter dealing with the Fifth Dwelling discusses the importance of continuing in obedience and devotion in these early stages of being a butterfly, at the same time offering comfort and assurance to those who have not received the same blessings. Both to establish the intimacy she describes and to maintain it, she stresses again that the most important thing is to bind one's will to the will of God instead of seeking some particular blessing. When the union is established, adversity and prosperity are equally rejoiced over as blessings from God, bringing the soul deeper into union with her King.

Next follows a discussion of grief as something that remains even in this joyful state of union. Grief, she points out, is what motivated Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead, and that kind of grief will remain as long as a soul is on earth. It does not, however, permeate and set up residence in the soul, but stays as much at the surface as the consolations she discussed earlier whose effects were both shallow and temporary. There is also the grief which accompanies the putting to death of the silkworm that has defined one's existence constantly to this point. However, it is a necessary and beautiful death, and one which brings with it sweetness of life unable to be gained by any other means. That grief, she assures her sisters, is worth forging through.

The obstacles to accomplishing that death are where she is sad to observe many pilgrims stay for the balance of their lives. They allow themselves to become self-satisfied and judgmental, hardening the ground in which charity would otherwise be embedded. She points out that God is under no obligation to bestow gifts to motivate believers to continue seeking Him. He wants followers who come willingly, leaving their desire for their own glory behind. All He requires of His children, however, is that they love Him and love each other, and in doing those things in truth, they will remain squarely in the center of His will. That is also the only reliable sign someone is truly following God steadfastly, since genuine and selfless love of neighbor even in the hardest of circumstances is not something the human soul can manifest. It is a capacity that can only be given by God.

The balance of the chapter contains a discussion of how important it is for the soul not to focus on the gifts she thinks she has been given, or to become satisfied that she has virtues and stop seeking after them. Imaginary virtues are as harmful to the soul as blatantly absent ones, and as much an obstacle to ever receiving the actual gift as never seeking it in the first place. She also discourages allowing the desire to be observed in a particular light. If a soul is preoccupied with the desire to hide every tiny fault, her focus is on the wrong member of the relationship. The same is true of those who desire to produce and reproduce certain experiences in prayer. The effect of time with God on the long-term condition of the soul is to be the motivation for prayer, rather than the experience one has while she is in prayer. So again, humility and selfless

submission to the will of God are the virtues it is most important to cultivate if deeper intimacy is to be attained.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Opening the final chapter dealing with the Fifth Dwelling, Teresa introduces the analogy of God as the groom and the worshipper as the bride. In this phase, He is still courting her, but gives her the first taste of what "love melting into love" and their eternal unity will be like. She calls this stage spiritual betrothal. The agreement being made is between a soul who sees how worthy her Lord is and His seeing how willingly and completely she is offering herself to Him. They are compatible, and He arranges for them to be together. As a sign of her agreement to devote herself to Him, she removes herself from the possibility of error. The enemy of human souls will do everything in its power to drive a wedge here before their union is impenetrable, so the soul must be vigilant about staying away from things that might tempt her away. The primary temptation she points to is the soul's attachment to her own rights. Judas himself received abundant teaching from the Lover of his soul Himself, and still gave in to temptation, so vigilance is necessary to the last.

Teresa suggests here that God even allows temptation in this stage to test the mettle of the ones He is about to reveal Himself intimately. She suggests souls in this position continually ask God to take them by the hand. She also assures her readers that God will supply ample warning when temptations are going to be presented. He does not desire that souls be tempted away, since those who get to this level of intimacy are so very rare. She encourages, as means of steeling oneself for the test, selfless love, forsaking the desire to be admired and impeccable performance of mundane tasks.

Returning to the metaphor of the worm, she reminds the believer in this phase how very particular her station is. God has transcended to call her, a worm, from her former state into beauty and intimate service. She would be forsaking quite a lot to turn away now. It is with the reminder that the challenge is what makes the task worthy that she closes this chapter.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

The Sixth Dwelling is the one on which Teresa spends the most time. Opening the first of eleven chapters on the topic, she returns to the analogy of the betrothed bride and talks about how eagerly she awaits her wedding day, to the point that she aches for it. The trial accompanying this phase is that manifestations of her longing may lead those observing her walk to suppose she is putting on a show of her faith instead of genuinely experiencing longing for her God. She mentions that particular trial as a comfort to those of her sisters who might be experiencing some version of it themselves. Having seen the beauty of heaven and the object of her eternal affection, she wishes to speed the day when she will be with Him.

She points out there are so many more people willing to believe the negative things they hear about people than who are willing to believe the good things, but that praise is an even more challenging trial than disparagement. Since humility is to be desired, praise always brings with it the danger that one's focus will return to her own virtue, real or imagined, and will leave the perfection of the God she serves. As she progresses, however, praise bothers her less for several reasons. One reason is that she recognizes how quickly and groundlessly people make positive and negative judgments, so she pays little attention to either. Another is that she recognizes the source of everything good in her is God, and so praises Him instead of absorbing it herself. Also, she understands that when another person recognizes good in her, God might be allowing them to look to her in order that He might teach them something through her. Finally, she understands that whatever people say about her, God is the only and ultimate source, so nothing anyone says about her is of any lasting substance if anything she does causes even one soul to praise God. As for the detractors, a new and unique kind of love springs up in her for them as tools in God's hands to teach her, and she yields all the more readily.

Next she discusses ailments that may accompany this state, specifically, physical pain. She says its benefit is that the first thing it teaches is patience and gives the illustration of a sister she watched in this state. The sister immediately concluded that her suffering must have been to refine her of flaws she had carried with her most of her life and she received them gratefully for allowing her to share in the suffering of Christ. The next specific example she gives is that of inept and paranoid spiritual advisors. Such men fear anything they do not understand and too often jump to the conclusion that it is either evil or a sign of mental illness. Confiding in such a man only leaves the soul to turn away feeling condemned and misunderstood. Her last example is the habit of self-condemnation that allows a soul to doubt the genuineness of her experience as soon as she is out of the throes of it.

Mental jumble is the last example she gives and she says that the only solution to any of these trials is to trust the mercy and intention of God to see them through to

accomplishing their purpose. They pave the soul's passage to the seventh dwelling and make all the soul's suffering worthwhile.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Returning again to the butterfly, Teresa explains she is uplifted by her trials, and so flies higher and higher. The soul is filled with an ever deepening longing for God, granted her in intense moments of brief encounter. She describes them as thunderbolts of unmistakable contact, continuously increasing her desire to unite with Him. Exquisite and delightful pain fills her and she wants to continue feeling it as long as she can. She calls it a burning ember that God presses into the soul but which does not catch fire. Its reality can be tested much more acutely than experiences in past dwellings, since the senses are closely monitoring what is going on. So there can be no doubt that it is not imagined nor from the spirit of evil. She is invigorated and inspired to worship by it.

The soul is filled with a fragrance, enticing her to enjoy Him, and so she knows that He is calling her, and she is willing to enjoy this longing for as long as He desires to call her with it. Teresa reminds her sisters that there is no reason to fear this state, but they may revel in it with gratitude.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

The third chapter dealing with the Sixth Dwelling begins with a discussion of hearing voices. Teresa allows that audible voices are very frequently signs of mental imbalance, having little to do with serving God, and that those professing to hear them should be listened to with compassion and advised accordingly. A contemplative practice might not be the wisest course for some. As with all spiritual temptations, they should be judged by their fruit. If a voice manifests disquiet and unrest, it should be forsaken as coming from a source that is less than divine.

She mentions voices, however, because at times they are used by God, and so she explains how a soul can be sure. If it assures her and brings her lasting peace, she can rest in it and know it is from the God she serves. If it causes her to linger in worship and increases her devotion, it is divine. If they burn in the memory as clearly as when she first heard them, they are God's words. The soul knows what it sees and hears and even while the mind may doubt, the soul will either remain peaceful or the effects will pass. Remaining changed is the sign Teresa gives that a voice is to be trusted. People around her may even try to convince her the voice is evil or imagined, but these are the moments in which faith is between a soul and her God, and the effect of His voice on His beloved is eternal.

Here Teresa offers a caution once a person is sure a voice is divine. Whenever a soul is commanded to take some action that will affect another person, she advises that she first consult a wiser spiritual guide, one who has had experience with such matters. One can always trust, says Teresa, that God will advise advisors who are diligently seeking Him, and when the execution of His will hangs in the balance.

Another way God communicates is through what Teresa calls intellectual vision. These are perfectly formed and understood gifts of understanding the veracity of which the recipient never doubts. She can know they are genuine by the following signs: the words are completely formed and in no way fuzzy, they are to do with something the soul had not been thinking about, it is not necessarily what the soul wants to hear, the truth is immediately clearly grasped, and at the same time it is carried in words, it transcends words. As with any spiritual favor, the results should be increased focus on God, increased peace and increased understanding. Anything less cannot be from God.

She concludes this chapter explaining that while some may advise avoiding the danger of mistake by remaining distracted enough to avoid these gifts, doing so is impossible if God is determined to speak. Since its fruit is always beneficial, it is nothing to be feared.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

The fourth chapter dealing with the Sixth Dwelling is where Teresa describes what she believes God does to consummate His engagement to His betrothed soul. A good deal of courage is required from a soul preparing to wed the King of Creation, she explains, and she would never have the courage to approach such an endeavor if the King did not give prepare her first. She describes what she calls moments of spiritual rapture in which God ignites an ember in the soul—some thought that spreads its flame through the entire soul—until it is consumed and then reborn like a phoenix. In the moment of its being ignited, the soul is granted clearer and more complete understanding of God than she has ever experienced before. She is allowed to observe the final and most intimate dwelling for just a moment, so she knows for what she is bound. The effect of that revelation is burned on her soul permanently, so she is changed by it forever and thereby prepared for her union with the King.

She is only partly able to describe the experience once it has ended, even though the change it works in her is permanent. She uses the examples of Jacob's and Moses' experiences and their limited abilities to clearly describe the physical details of their experiences, even though they were real and life-altering. She explains that these experiences are just larger and stranger than anything the human intellect is able to lay hold of. Granted a glimpse of the eternal and perfect, the soul is changed, but the mind is only able to hold on to a general impression.

Describing the physical state the body enters while these revelations are being experienced, Teresa uses the analogy of death, saying the body is completely still and cool, and once the experience has ended, the mind is unable to comprehend anything that does not awaken the impulse to love. Awakening from that stupor, she is overwhelmed with the desire to love Him with everything she does. Teresa says eloquently that the soul wishes everything on earth were a tongue with which she could praise Him. She begins to prefer privacy in her revelations, so that there is no focus on her when she is having these moments with her betrothed, so no explanation is required from her. Humility is also easiest in such circumstances. She closes this discussion warning against false raptures, in which the recipient deceives herself into thinking she is experiencing God when she is not, discrediting the ones and the moments when she actually is.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

Teresa devotes the fifth chapter on the Sixth dwelling to describing another state of rapture in which bravery becomes much more necessary. In it, the soul is whisked away with startling speed like a tiny boat being lifted up by a quickly rising flood of water. This whisking away teaches the soul by quick impression a thousand different things equally hard to explain. The distinction between this rapture and the last is that this one makes living much more painful, seemingly meaningless to her in light of her magnificent revelation. To comfort her, God leaves her a token of her visit, like those the Israelites received when they visited the Promised Land. The first is knowledge of the greatness of God, the second is the humility of clarified self-knowledge and the third is a loss of appetite for worldly things. These tokens are the things that stimulate her appetite for her betrothed, and so with a final reminder of the soul's need for courage, she closes.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

The sixth chapter on the Sixth Dwelling describes the immensity of a soul's desire to die and join her Beloved. Life seems unendurably separate from Him in all of her moments except for her moments of worship. She yearns, since she is still living, at least to have the freedom to go deep into the world and inspire other souls to praise Him, but is forced to remember that in the 16th century, living in a convent, that is a task reserved for the men, so she must remain withdrawn. The butterfly can find no rest. Rather than allowing the reader to pity this soul, however, Teresa reminds her that she has the infinity of the strength of God to buoy her. In the moments when she becomes timid and so aware of her own weakness, God even leaves her to feel those moments, to cause her to lean increasingly more on His strength. Her advice to these souls is to recognize the reason for these desires and to distract herself from them. Surrender herself instead to devoting herself to service, something to which she is now even more perfectly suited.

Here she offers another warning against falsely interpreting other intensity of emotion for this kind of longing. She explains that the tears of longing for heaven will be soothing and comforting and that tears from constitutional weakness will be agitating and exhausting. She warns to be cautious about the necessity of any tears, but says that if there is humility present, they cannot harm the soul.

Discussing the opposite extreme of the emotional effect of this level of intimacy, Teresa describes intense joy resulting from God's leaving the soul and the faculties bound to each other. So while the soul is immensely close to God, the faculties experience the joy of it without knowing exactly what they are so immensely happy about. She says the soul in this state would throw festivals in His name if she could, so intense is her desire to celebrate Him. People might even think the people in this mode of intense celebration completely mad, as they did in the examples of Saint Francis and Peter of Alcantara. Teresa compares it to inebriation, and closes the chapter leaving the soul in a place in which all she can do is to praise God.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

Teresa devotes the seventh chapter on the Sixth Dwelling to the topic of the painful lamenting the soul does about all the ways she falls short or has in the past been brazen in her disobedience or in any way ungrateful. Increased knowledge of God just serves to intensify the scrutiny with which she views herself and considers her own shortcomings. Recognizing the mercy with which she has been blessed and the readiness with which she was forgiven in spite of these shortcomings just makes the sting of her regret more intense.

Her recommendation for the souls in this state is that they meditate on the saints who have walked this path before them. She even suggests they cultivate relationships with them in order that they be able to learn from the intimacy gained from communing with these saints. It is still of tantamount importance, however, that the soul stay close to Christ. Meditation by way of the intellect is not altogether necessary in this state, since the will is already engaged and can take the soul straight to Him, and the intellect can be a clumsy and cumbersome vehicle. She says the intellect can be set aside harmlessly if it is necessary to satisfy the soul, but says the soul may need the intellect to bring it where it needs to go. The soul will inevitably want more exclusive and undistracted focus than the human vehicle is capable of, and so some patience will be required as long as she is in human form. She describes the type of meditation she recommends: picture some moment of intense sacrifice in Jesus' life, so that the effect of that moment on one's thinking is enough to occupy the intellect for days, simply contemplating his character and endurance of suffering. The will responds to the meditation with the urge to serve God similarly, likewise with whatever characteristics of Christ's life the soul wishes to emulate.

The end of this chapter discusses the importance of maintaining focus on the character of Christ, whether in His time on earth or after He left that vehicle, whichever serves the soul better. Teresa cites a time in her own walk when she was so earnestly seeking the consolations of prayer that she forgot this simple skeletal guideline and felt scattered and disquieted by her practice. She encourages her sisters to keep themselves anchored to that meditation, so the character of Christ is continually what they emulate.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 in the Sixth dwelling describes intellectual visions. These are visions not received by the senses, but burned into the memory as soul-changing images of God, and they persist in the soul with the knowledge that God is always watching, so the soul intensely desires that everything she do please Him. This is what sets it apart from the other revelations. This leaves behind a particular knowledge of the constant companionship of God. All of the other favors become much more constant, and the soul grows very quickly as a result. Humility comes to her naturally as she recognizes her ever increasing responsibility and passion to be of service to a God so much infinitely greater than she.

Once again, Teresa assures her sisters not to be afraid of the spirit of evil. If God allows them to tempt her here, He will also be sure they are defeated; she has all of the strength of God to guide her forward. They should as always, however, be sure that the effects of the visions they have are consistent with God's other gifts, so they cannot be deceived. She also warns them only to share these experiences with people who will keep them secret, and who are both educated and spiritual. After that, they should stop talking about it and just move forward with obedience. She reminds them to humbly remember that God blesses whomever He sees fit in the way He sees will benefit them the most, and they should trust Him rather than striving or asking for particular favors.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary and Analysis

Introducing the ninth chapter on the Sixth Dwelling, Teresa compares one's faith with a crystal containing healing powers. Just carrying the stone around, the soul can feel its benefit and it demonstrates its potency in the lives of the people she shares it with, as well. One day, the giver of the crystal comes and opens the box containing the crystal, since he is the only one who can, so she can see it, and the image of its beauty is engraved in her memory forever. That analogy is what Teresa uses to explain what she calls imaginative visions, or visions received visually. The same way other visions embed themselves more as impressions than crisp memories, these visions seem like something seen through a film and overcome the soul with awe.

Teresa explains this vision is such an insight into the holy that the soul cannot bear the thought of disappointing the perfectly peaceful and gracious face of her Beloved. It is that thought that keeps her mind fixed on integrity in her actions and on the larger truth which rules existence. Having sat in the unmistakable, unimaginable presence of her God, she wants to serve Him purely for as long as she lives.

After spending a little time drawing the distinction between real and humanly manufactured visions, Teresa moves into a discussion of how to approach them with one's spiritual advisors. First, she should observe herself to see whether her humility and virtues are stimulated by the vision. When she has holy fruits to report, she should go openly to her advisor, and trust his ability to liken her experience to one of his own. Even if he cannot, since she has made sure her advisor is both educated and discerning, he will know how to determine whether a vision is from God or from the spirit of evil. Since the soul is in God's hands, even a vision from evil will be a road God will use to bless her. Her only task is to remain grateful and steadfast to the Master of her journey.

In the cases of genuine visions, she will have it to reflect on whenever she needs encouragement or perspective. In cases when a soul has only heard of such an experience coming to another sister, she advises her against asking for a blessing like it for herself for several reasons: first, a lack of humility leads a soul to ask for what she has not earned; second, if she is looking for it, she is more likely to be deceived by evil; third, she can imagine that a vision is real that is not; fourth, it is presumptuous to instruct God on what should come next in one's path; fifth, the trials involved in progressing are not light, and sixth, the thing you thought would bless you may curse you in the end. She points her readers to the fact that several highly evolved souls are never given these visions. She says that progress made by walking faithfully is the progress that changes and teaches a soul, and that the most admirable souls are the ones who do not seek favor, just ways in which they can humbly serve God. She calls the desire to serve humbly a supernatural gift.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary and Analysis

The penultimate chapter dealing with the Sixth Dwelling is dedicated to instruction on distinguishing a real vision. Her first comment is to remind her readers that the spirit of evil instills unrest and disquiet, when a vision should inspire a soul to get lost in loving God. Next she describes the moment in which God instills deep secrets to a soul, and she is able to see clearly the ways she has strayed from Him while she has dwelled with Him. She compares living for God to living in a vast castle, and points out that any selfish thing one does once she has given herself to God, she does inside that castle. Realization of that fact should make the soul grateful she is not instantaneously cast out in the moment of her disobedience, and should also quiet any self-righteousness that may try to spring up in her.

She closes the chapter stressing God is pure truth, and so by contrast, every man is a liar. The humility that should produce in humanity is infinite, and should remind everyone of the very temporary state of everything on earth. The things of heaven are the only and most real things in existence, and should be prioritized accordingly.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary and Analysis

In the final chapter on the Sixth Dwelling, Teresa turns back to the analogy of the butterfly to explain the feeling in the soul of ever-increasing anguish and unrest, like a butterfly never being able to find a place to land. This is the condition in which the soul finds itself for the final element Teresa describes in the Sixth Dwelling. She describes pain like a flaming arrow piercing the body, but the spiritual body, not the physical one. In that moment, she explains, the soul forgets everything about its own existence and is only able to focus on the pain. Estrangement from God is the source of the pain, and the soul becomes fixated on trying to alleviate it. Self-knowledge only intensifies the pain, since the condition of the self is the source of the soul's alienation from her Creator.

She describes it as a companionless, incurable condition that weakens the body and from which it takes days to recover, although it lasts just a moment. Even knowing the pain is precious and a gift intended to bring her closer to her God does nothing to ease the pain of her suffering. The only comfort she can offer is a comparison to the underworld in which there is no foreseeable resolution to the torment of the soul, and equally complete self-knowledge. There is, however, while the soul is experiencing this pain on earth, neither any way of avoiding it, nor any way of concealing the experience from whomever might be around at the moment it comes.

It does, however, leave wonderful effects on the soul in its wake. The soul, having experienced such pain, now knows it can endure any earthly trial. She also knows there is no earthly comfort she can trust to satisfy her soul, so will trust heaven completely. It also stretches the soul's capacity for equally extreme joy. Her courage is heightened and she is able to answer the question Jesus posed to the sons of Zebedee, "are you able to drink from this chalice?" in the confident affirmative. She is strengthened by the Almighty Himself, and ready for the final dwelling.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary and Analysis

Introducing the Seventh Dwelling, Teresa explains that in the analogy of being God's bride, the soul and her Lord are now wed, and He is preparing to take her into His chamber to consummate their love. The soul being filled with light, getting progressively brighter as she nears His most intimate chamber, Theresa reminds the soul to remember to pray for those who are still shackled, blind, deaf and living in darkness. In the same way it would be cruel to leave a man standing blindly amid a great fast to starve, it is cruel to leave a soul unaware of how to gain nourishment without the knowledge of how to get it.

In the case of the soul in the state of grace, however, she is now ready to come into the very center of herself, where her King has been calling her. In this dwelling, the soul is rendered blind and deaf again, so overwhelming is the delight of being next to God. She becomes aware transcendently of the three distinct Persons of the Trinity and of their perfect unity. What the rest of Christendom knows by faith, she finally understands by sight. Instead of overwhelming her and whisking the soul away, this experience makes her more present than ever. She is now in perfect companionship with God and able to walk in that consciousness. It is sweet friendship without the need of constant checking or reminding.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary and Analysis

The marriage is still not, Teresa explains, something that can be fully realized in this life, and that is the explanation with which she opens the second chapter on the Seventh Dwelling. The soul is simply left to take on His work as her own, and He takes her work as His. No separation is possible anymore as it was in previous stages of their engagement. Like light coming in through two windows and becoming one light, they are impossible to separate. The truths that appeared to the soul before become ineffable. The soul is cleanly stripped of her worldly attachments and made more perfectly spirit with every passing day.

Even so, Teresa warns her readers again that souls must always be cautious about offending the God they serve. There are always wars going on in the other chambers of the soul, so she must keep her focus fixed on the innermost chambers and its holy inhabitant. She closes this first chapter with that reminder, and the comfort that the passions can be quieted and her intimacy with the Most High kept secure.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary and Analysis

The third chapter on the Seventh Dwelling begins with Teresa's return to the analogy of the butterfly to explain she has now died of happiness. Finally finding a place to rest, the butterfly demonstrates that the soul can now finally experience forgetfulness of self, the only thing in the past able to steal her joy. She no longer pines for or even thinks about the afterlife or her own striving, but exists in peaceful, contented service of God as if she is already living in heaven. About the business of her King, she even desires to bear burdens for Him. Joy comes to her from being persecuted for her King, and a particular love for her tormenters even springs up in her, desiring particularly to show His love to them.

Even in the moments she remembers she will one day be free of her body and in heaven able to serve Him perfectly, she is able to turn her focus back to her inner temple and be perfectly united with her King, willing to serve Him here as long as He has use for her here. The reminders He offers her whenever her spirit flags are regular and easy experiences instead of the jarring, unfamiliar touches they were when she first experienced them. Teresa uses the opportunity to remind her readers in every dwelling that those moments of divine touch are love letters from God and must be received openly and gratefully. Remembering that her response is to be unto God and not men, she reminds them to receive them with thanks and worship.

The teaching God does in the soul in this dwelling comes silently, like the building of God's temple, intimately and continuously. She no longer fears these moments of intervention, and they will only happen in public with increasing rarity. Instead, they will be triggered in moments of devotion. The only thing she fears now is herself, knowing it is the only thing that can pull her from her God. She presses in more closely all the time to the teaching coming to her from God.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary and Analysis

Closing her discussion of the Seven Dwellings, St. Teresa assures curious readers that the things she has described do not necessarily all happen just the way she described them to every seeking soul, nor always in the same order. She says there will even be times when vile creatures who were not able to deter a soul from her course will come back to tempt and torment her again even when she is very close to her God. The difference she will always be able to observe, she assures them, is that she will have a mighty and faithful Companion by her side through every trial in her life. She explains God will continue to refine and humble His child through the very end of her life, and the process will continue to inspire praise.

The most important goal before the follower of God remains to diligently seek to serve Him blamelessly and retain her awe of Him. It is indubitable that souls who exist closely to God will experience the most severe trials, and this will make their communion with the suffering of Jesus on earth even deeper and more heart-changing. Drawing on the scriptural example of Peter on his own way to be crucified for testifying to his faith, Teresa describes the revelation to Peter of Jesus Christ Himself telling him that He was on His way to be crucified again. The knowledge that Jesus was walking his path faithfully alongside him and his service was acknowledged and pleasing to God was an immense comfort to Peter.

Next Teresa discusses the importance of actions following one's lofty promises made to God in moments of worship. Worship of and intimacy with God finds its fulfillment when the one encouraged and built up by the King goes and carries out His work. He strengthens her for that very purpose and it is her offering to Him to carry it out. Even little by little, the work she can find to do deepens her attachment to God and distances her from attachment to her own will. She encourages her readers to thirst for prayer, not because it is edifying only, but because it is from prayer that they will receive the strength they need to go into the world and make their devotion to the King a useful tool in His hands.

Teresa takes time to address the fear among her readers that they are not gifted to be teachers and to lead souls into communion with God. She encourages them first to prayer, pointing out its power to change hearts and minds, and next to focus on one's own intimate group of friends, since those are the relationships in which they will most be able to demonstrate the change which has come from her faith. She tells them that the fire of their devotion will enkindle the souls who are close to it. God can take a small offering given willingly and make it a mighty gift. This is the tone in which she closes her book. She reminds her sisters that anything offered in love is infinitely more valuable to God and the people one serves than any amount of skill or giftedness.



Characters

St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa is an older member of a 16th century monastery given the task of writing a discourse on prayer. The discourse is meant to serve as instruction on the topic for her monastic sisters. She is in every way an older sister to the women who share the monastery with her, referring to stories they have confided to her in the past, maintaining the secrecy of each woman's identity, and telling their stories with insight and compassion. She also describes having written many such assignments in the past, but confesses being particularly nervous about undertaking such an important topic as prayer. Throughout the book, she includes prayers in her writing that God will clarify her thinking about a subject so she can communicate it clearly. She also interjects apologies occasionally for her thoughts wandering to include sideline stories, and asks that her readers forgive her, since she might not be able to remember the very important thing she was going to say next. By the end of her book, it is easy to regard her as an intimate friend, both who has confided in the reader, and who has guided her to increased wisdom and self-understanding.

God

Teresa refers to God most often in *The Interior Castle* as her Beloved. He is the object of the sisters' shared quest and of their collective and individual devotion. Teresa reveals an intimate and tender devotion to God in her work, seeking to identify with the lifestyle and selfless love of Jesus during His time on earth, and looking to God to shape that character in her in whatever way He chooses. She continually reminds her readers God has perfect insight into the condition of their hearts, their destinies, and the process that will be most effective in preparing them for what He has for them. For that reason, she reminds them to humbly submit to God's loving hand as it shapes and guides them, and to remain humble as they see the fruits He plants in them blossom. She describes Him as a giver of gifts—as those seeking Him draw closer in, he grants them more and deeper insights into His character and love for them. Intimacy that manifests itself as selfless obedience is the goal of drawing close to God, so the sisters become His intimately nurtured children, prepared and enabled to be about their Father's business. God moves from teacher and guide to intimate lover, walking alongside the sisters as they serve Him with endless willingness and joy.

The Spirit of Evil

The enemy of the sisters' souls is the spirit of evil, referred to in her writings in the lower case, possibly because she is referring to only one of several when she discusses them. These are the characters that seek to tempt seeking souls away from their paths of contemplation and devotion. The means they use are most frequently pride or other



kinds of self-involvement, jealousy of the gifts being given to other sisters, and temptation to prioritize and spend time seeking after the material things or approval of the world instead of heaven.

The Butterfly

The butterfly is Teresa's analogy to the seeking soul which undergoes a metamorphosis as it moves into the deeper dwellings of the castle. The butterfly as a silkworm first builds the cocoon, or the house in which it will die, which serves as the house of prayer in Teresa's analogy. As it lives, it experiences all of the emotions of the journey and periods of restlessness until at last it dies of happiness in the Sixth Dwelling.

Poisonous Reptiles

The reptiles are the vile creatures that creep around outside the castle and creep occasionally into the exterior dwellings to tempt souls away from their devotional lives. They are characterized as anything seeking to hold more sway over the soul's attention than the things of heaven, and to dominate the landscape outside the sanctuary the soul builds for herself and to which she can retreat to pray. The creatures enter only the outer-most dwellings and seek to deceive and call away the soul with increasing determination the deeper and closer the soul gets to the King's dwelling.

The wise man who told Teresa to write this book

The monastery of which Teresa was a part in 1577 when she wrote this book was called Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the man who gave her this assignment was one of her spiritual advisers there. He suggested that women understand better how to communicate complicated ideas to other women, and so requested she write a dissertation on the subject of prayer.

Spiritual Advisers to be sought out

Teresa describes the kind of adviser a contemplating soul should seek as being both educated and discerning. She says that a half-educated man will assume she is mentally imbalanced when her spiritual life starts to include revelations, and a man without discernment will not know how to advise her once she has had any experience he has not.

Jealous Souls

Teresa warns those of her sisters who might receive spiritual favors to remain quiet and humble about them, both in order that they not allow their pride to interfere with their own worship and so they not cause those of their sisters who might be tempted to



accuse them of falsehood or putting on a dramatic show to stumble into those temptations. She encourages the sisters never to compare their experiences with another person's, but walk through their own experiences faithfully attentive to its lessons.

Prideful Souls

Another group Teresa warns is those who might be tempted to give themselves credit for the things God reveals to them in worship. She reminds them at nearly every stage of progress that there is nothing a soul does to earn these favors; she cannot even ask for them with pure intentions. Rather it is the grace and prerogative of God to give gifts to whomever He wills, whenever He sees that the time is right. Humility is a virtue to be continually renewed with every new development.

Jesus as a Fellow Sufferer

Later in the book, Teresa talks about the trials of continuing to live on earth, separated from the Beloved of their souls, and encourages them by reminding them they are sharing in the suffering of Jesus, who lived separated from His Father and His home. He did this in order to live as humble a life as could be lived, completely in service of other people, and then to be rejected and killed by souls He created and loved enough to die for. She suggests that any suffering a soul does on earth only serves to bring her closer to Him, and so is to be cherished.

The Saints

Teresa encourages her sister to study the saints, and even commune with them in prayer. She suggests cultivating relationships with those who have walked similar paths in the past will be an avenue of learning the sisters might not have access to among earthly teachers.



Objects/Places

The Castle appears in non-fiction

The analogy that frames the whole book is that of a crystal castle filled with light emanating from the center where God lives and calls souls to worship. The castle is the soul itself, and its dwellings are organized from outer, where the world holds sway and fights for the soul's attention, to inner, where the voice of the world grows quiet and the soul is able to be attentive to the teaching and worship of God.

First Dwelling appears in non-fiction

This is where the soul first enters when she has decided to turn inward to pray. The world is still very loud and pressing in around her, but her attention has begun to deepen to eternal things.

Second Dwelling appears in non-fiction

The soul begins to understand the benefit of leaving the temptations of the world behind and is better able to hear God calling her deeper into prayer.

Third Dwelling appears in non-fiction

The soul begins to be deeply determined to live a life pleasing to God and turn herself over to His guidance.

Fourth Dwelling appears in non-fiction

Teresa describes this as the place in which the soul begins to perceive the supernatural, a more beautiful dwelling because she is getting closer to where the King lives. The soul experiences extremes of emotion as her soul begins to taste heaven. The Prayer of Recollection and the Prayer of Quiet are placed here.

Fifth Dwelling appears in non-fiction

The soul grieves her separation from God and mourns the ways in which she has been unfaithful in her past. The Prayer of Union comes here in which the soul dies to this world in order to live completely for God.



Sixth Dwelling appears in non-fiction

The soul's betrothal to her King is undertaken in the Sixth Dwelling. She seeks solitude in order to pray and be as close to her God as possible. Meanwhile God is testing her to be sure she trusts Him completely and maintains her humility.

Seventh Dwelling appears in non-fiction

The soul and God are wed, and she becomes as happy to live forever and do His will here as to die and be united with Him in heaven, so complete is her communion with Him even on earth. She even delights in torment, because it inspires her to share the love of God with her tormenters.

Dark World Outside appears in non-fiction

The vile creatures who seek to keep the soul from her contemplation, wrapped up in the priorities of the material, live outside the castle. It is a world Teresa describes as being filled with poisonous reptiles and one which should be left behind entirely.

The House of Prayer appears in non-fiction

The Prayer of Recollection and the analogy of the silk worm both refer to the place in which the soul is intended to go and pray. The Prayer of Recollection is when the soul remembers the union she is intended to experience with her Creator and the silkworm analogy describes the soul's entering the place where it will die to its old life and be reborn as a beautiful, eternal creature.



Themes

Forsaking the Things of This World

The entire book contains themes of turning away from and leaving behind the priorities of earth. Prayer is the first step toward no longer trusting the world to satisfy one's soul and turning toward the eternal, which contains those things God intended to feed eternal souls. The vile creatures outside and in the exterior dwellings of the castle symbolize the appetites and material distractions of the world, all of which are temporary and without the ability to satisfy. It is the soul's responsibility to turn away from the things she recognizes as pulling her attention from her God, and to retrain her appetites to crave the things of God. Even in the deeper dwellings, closer to God, Teresa talks about the human temptation to grow prideful at observing one's progress, and reminds her readers that every good gift they receive is from God, having nothing to do with the soul's deserving it. God gives gifts out of His grace because He sees benefit in giving them.

The benefits of such a turning away are many. Souls cultivate a better understanding of themselves in light of their understanding of the character and intentions of God. Seeing His purity and sacrificial love, a soul sees better her own selfishness and attachment to earthly comforts. Understanding God's vision for His creation instructs a soul in how to serve it instead of just how to gain from it. This vision is only gained by learning to see it from its Creator's perspective. Finally, understanding what it will be like to live in eternal communion and worship of God is an outgrowth of turning one's back on the things that distract from worship on earth and allows worship in this life to become more intimate.

Humility as a Necessity for Growth

Teresa's teaching on nearly every dwelling includes a plea that her readers remain humble. Seeking souls who experience spiritual insights may be tempted to attribute them to their own accomplishment or worthiness instead of to the insightful grace of God. Such a divergence of focus, turning from God's worthiness to one's own, will become an obstacle to worship and a flaw which those watching a soul can point to in order to discredit them. Teresa points out that there may be times in which God allows watching souls to think that spiritual blessing comes from a certain person, in order to let that person teach by example, making it even more important that one's focus stays fixed. Her warning is that a person is only a useful teacher if she keeps her own focus on Him as the source and guide instead of on herself. Humility counters the efforts of the spirit of evil who will try to divert a soul's attention from God at every opportunity.

The complement to a lack of humility manifesting itself as pride is when the lack allows the focus on self to warp into self-loathing and scorn. The focus of the heart is still on the wrong member of the relationship, and the meditation of the heart turns exclusively to one's unworthiness. God asks to remain the focus of His children's hearts in order to



avoid this downfall of self-involvement as well. As long as the heart stays focused on the character and grace of the God it serves, it will remain soft and jubilant, allowing God to shape it and show the world what joy He intends to bestow on those who belong to Him.

Seeking Good Spiritual Counsel

Teresa keeps very much within the parameters of monastic life in her reminding her readers frequently to go to their spiritual advisers with every new development in their worship, in order to be counseled wisely in how to proceed. Since there are half-educated advisers who will jump to the conclusion that a person is crazy if she has an experience in worship that they themselves have not heard of or experienced, she warns the sisters to be careful and sure of what they are experiencing before they confide in a superior. When they do, she advises they seek out advisers who are both educated and discerning, so the sisters can be sure they have walked further down the spiritual path and will know how to advise them. She recommends for the same reason that the sisters cultivate relationships with saints who have lived whole faithful lives and are now in heaven and able, according to Catholic tradition, to serve as a kind of spiritual advisers as well. Humbly submitting to counsel is, according to Teresa, a vitally important component in proceeding wisely and safely down the spiritual path.

Teresa evidences her own dedication to submitting herself to spiritual counsel throughout her book. The first example comes early when she describes receiving the assignment to write this particular book and wonders at her own qualifications. Trusting her superiors to know what is best, she faithfully sets out on the task. In another instance, she is explaining counsel she received in a season of spiritual dryness in her own life, and the shift in perspective it brought about in her that allowed her to endure and move past the trial, having learned from it something she could pass on.

Serving Impeccably in the Mundane Tasks of Life

Also in keeping with the philosophy of monastic life, Teresa teaches that even as one progresses to the most intimate levels of communion with God, souls should devote themselves to humble execution of even the most mundane tasks to be done on earth. It is a way of teaching by example and of reminding a soul that everything she does is an act of worship done for God and not for man. A soul seeking to emulate the life of Jesus, for example, would not be above any menial or humble task, and would execute it without need of either the praise or even the notice of people. When all of one's actions are executed as acts of worship, done as if with God Himself is at one's elbow, no amount of care or thoughtfulness of those who will benefit from the work is too tedious. It raises the standard of living of those sharing their lives with one another, and keeps their attentions free to meditate on heavenly things, rather than to be distracted by another sister too self-absorbed to have fulfilled her daily duties. The same philosophy can easily be applied to life outside a monastery. Acts of love are just as communicative when they are mundane and quietly done as when they are elaborate and publicly done. It is in keeping with the goal of maintaining one's humility that acts

done on earth be done beautifully for the worship of God than that they be done either showily or with dramatic grumbling for the notice of men.

Style

Perspective

St. Teresa of Avila writes this book on assignment from her superiors and addresses it to her sisters in the monastery at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1577. She is an older sister in the order, and has written other books to serve as instruction to her sisters. This is a book her advisers thought her particularly well-suited to write because of her advanced station and because she was a woman addressing other women. She writes as such, and as a practitioner who has talked with many other practitioners and so offers the perspectives of several different walkers on the path. She is both a faithful servant of God herself and a faithful adherent to the rules of the order, and so communicates her teaching in accordance with both scriptural and monastic standards.

Tone

Teresa's tone is a mix of reverent love for the Object and subject of her book, God and prayer, and of self-deprecating apology for not feeling entirely qualified to write on such an important topic. She is vulnerable and compassionate, very obviously addressing women she cares about very deeply. She is also transparently deeply in love with the Savior and Lover of her soul, and that lends a tone of reverence and sweetness to her style as she writes to instruct others to attain a similar depth of intimacy with God.

Structure

The book is structured very formally around the Seven Dwellings, with a prologue and an afterward. Internally, it becomes evident she is not a trained writer, writing in 1577, and writing a letter to her closest friends. She wanders on and off the subject with asides about all manner of things, all beneficial, but allowing for an informality of structure it would be unusual to find in writers of today. Each Dwelling is divided into a number of shorter chapters, allowing them to be divided themselves into sorts of rooms, and making them easier to understand as stages of growth.



Quotes

"Not long ago a very wise man told me that souls who do not practice prayer are like people whose limbs are paralyzed. Even though they have hands and feet, they cannot command them." First Dwelling, Chapter 1, p. 39.

"And yet it seems to me that we will never know ourselves unless we seek to know God. Glimpsing His greatness, we recognize our own powerlessness; gazing upon His purity, we notice where we are impure; pondering His humility, we see how far from humble we are." First Dwelling, Chapter 2, p. 46.

"His Majesty knows what is best for us. He does not require our opinion on the matter and, in fact, has every right to point out to us that we don't have any idea what we're asking for." Second Dwelling, Chapter 1, p. 61.

"But I warn you: abandon yourselves only under the condition that you harbor no illusions about the Beloved being under some obligation to repay you for your sacrifice with divine favors." Third Dwelling, Chapter 1, p. 73.

"The purpose of these analogies is for you to consider if you have truly detached yourself from that which you have given up. Little things arise all the time that can serve to test you and prove if you have achieved mastery over your own cravings." Third Dwelling, Chapter 2, p. 78.

"But it could be that the soul is fully present with Him in the innermost chamber while the mind stays on the periphery of the palace, grappling with a thousand wild and dangerous creatures and gaining real merit from this kind of struggle." Fourth Dwelling, Chapter 1, p. 92.

"It seems that without any intervention a temple is being built through this supernatural recollection where the soul can go to pray. The senses and other external things begin to lose their hold, and the soul starts to recover what she has lost." Fourth Dwelling, Chapter 3, p. 103.

"The shepherd's call grows so powerful that the ties that had bound the faculties to external things and estranged them from Him unravel and they enter the castle." Fourth Dwelling, Chapter 3, p. 104.

"She starts to make use of the remedies available in spiritual community; things like ritual, sacred literature, inspiring talks. These are medicines that can cure a soul that has been deadened by carelessness and unconsciousness, a soul struggling against the constant opportunity for error." Fifth Dwelling, Chapter 2, p. 128.

"Now the soul's great love for God moves her to surrender herself so completely into His hands that, in the deep peace that comes with this surrender, she neither knows nor desires anything beyond that His will be done." Fifth Dwelling, Chapter 2, p. 133.



"What the Beloved wants from us is action. What He wants is that if one of your friends is sick, you take care of her. Don't worry about interrupting your devotional practice. Have compassion." Fifth Dwelling, Chapter 3, p. 142.

"It is all about love melting into love. Its expression is absolutely pure, exceedingly delicate, and gentle. There is no way to describe it, but the Beloved knows how to make it deeply felt." Fifth Dwelling, Chapter 4, p. 145.

"God is not going to lightly let a soul who has come to Him slip into the grip of the spirit of evil.... His Majesty is so reluctant to lose such a soul that He offers her a thousand interior warnings so that no potential harm will be hidden from her." Fifth Dwelling, Chapter 4, p. 149.

"She becomes brutally aware of her insignificance and realizes how little we would be able to do if the Beloved ever decided to abandon us." Sixth Dwelling, Chapter 1, p. 163.

"For the love of God, friends, let us benefit from our faults and learn from our mistakes.... By witnessing our transgressions we are able to surrender ourselves to the mercy of our Beloved so that He can draw goodness out of our negativity and we can be even more pleasing to Him." Sixth Dwelling, Chapter 4, p. 191.

"Her impulse is to shout it from the rooftops so that everyone can help her praise our Lord.... Oh, what festivals and exhibitions the soul would put on, if she could, so that the whole world would witness her joy!" Sixth Dwelling, Chapter 6, p. 209.

"My point is and will continue to be this: these favors from God inspire the soul to walk with beauty and grace, which inspires Him to give her even more." Sixth Dwelling, Chapter 8, p. 229.

"The soul remains perpetually in that center with her God. We could say that their union is like pressing two softened candles together so that their twin flames yield a single light. Or we could say that the wick, the wax, and the flame are all the same." Seventh Dwelling, Chapter 2, p. 270.

"If the soul wishes for her prayers to be fruitful, let her give up her attachment to her own way and open to the divine will." Seventh Dwelling, Chapter 4, p. 289.



Topics for Discussion

For what reasons do people undertake a regular routine of prayer?

In what ways would a monastic life of prayer be more or less heart-changing than a life of prayer for a person who lives outside a monastery?

Do you think the same book written today would be as well-received as this one was when it was written in the 16th century? Why do you think this particular work continues to be so celebrated?

Discuss Teresa's idea of the poisonous creatures seeking to distract souls from prayer. What do you think the qualities of our culture are today that might keep a person from seeking connection with God?

Describing the Prayer of Recollection, Teresa suggests the soul is remembering something she has known before. What do you think she means? In regaining what was lost, what was it she had, and when did she have it?

Many ideas of meditation require quieting the thoughts, and Teresa suggests that such an undertaking as quieting one's thoughts is impossible and would just be frustrating and distracting to undertake. Do you think she is right? What role do you think conscious thought plays in meditation and in what way is it possible to let one's thoughts "do battle on the periphery" while one's soul is in the innermost dwelling with God?

What kind of suffering might Teresa mean when she describes suffering that brings a soul into closer communion with the suffering Jesus? What kind of service might affect similar communion in a soul?

What religious philosophies other than Catholicism might lead a person through similar levels of intimacy with God? By what evidences might such a conclusion be reached?

Are there other religious philosophies in which similar periods of wishing to be united with God through death might be expected? Do you think it is God's intention or expectation that humans experience such desires?

In what ways are lives beautifully lived an encouragement to the people who live after it? Do people today live in such a way as to inspire generations that follow? What inspiration do you think our contemporaries are hoping to leave?

Why is pride such an obstacle to spiritual practice? In what ways can you observe it nullifying or perverting spiritual practice today?