

THE WAY OF PERFECTION Lesson 1

READ: Introduction from Vol. I, The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following:

Do I always consult Church authorities in regard to my extraordinary spiritual experiences, and any spiritual writings I may produce?

Do I seek corroboration with Holy Scripture in such matters?

How can I apply St. Teresa's way of helping the Church combat the evils of our times?

What does an examination of conscience tell me concerning love of neighbor, detachment and humility?

REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:

- 1. Why was The Way of Perfection written, and for whom?**
- 2. In what decade were the first and second versions of the work written?**
- 3. Why did St. Teresa write a second version of the manuscript?**
- 4. Where is the autograph (hand-written original) on display?**
- 5. Why was St. Teresa so concerned with consulting learned men about her experiences and writings?**

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 1

- 6. By what means did St. Teresa seek to remedy the evils with which the Church of her day was beset?**

- 7. Why was mysticism (especially in women) looked upon so suspiciously in Teresa's day?**

- 8. Upon what did St. Teresa found her defense of women of faith?**

- 9. Why was mental prayer (as opposed to vocal and liturgical) feared by many in her day?**

- 10. How did Teresa reconcile the vocal vs. mental prayer controversy when referring to the Lord's Prayer?**

- 11. How did life in the Incarnation differ from that of the St. Joseph monastery founded by St. Teresa?**

- 12. The Way of Perfection is a practical book of advice and counsel on what subject?**

- 13. What are the three practices upon which Teresa dwells in order to help dispose her nuns (and us) to a life of prayer?**

- 14. How does Teresa's prayer of recollection differ from the method of discursive meditation?**

- 15. What is the source of the Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition of The Way of Perfection?**

THE WAY OF PERFECTION Lesson 2

READ: Prologue and Chapters one, two, three, four and five

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal on each of the following thoughts and Scripture passages;

For what kinds of things do I usually pray? Are they for God's honor and glory, or primarily for personal gain of some kind? Are they really of importance when seen in the light of eternity? (chapter one) Matthew 6: 25-33 Romans 8: 5,6

**How can I adopt a true spirit of poverty while living in the world in my particular circumstances?
(chapter two) I Timothy 6: 6-11 Psalm 34: 8-11 Luke 12: 15-21, 33,34**

**Do I make prayer for the Church and her ministers one of my highest priorities?
(chapter three) II Thes. 3: 1-3 Ephes.6: 18-20 II Cor.11; 28,29 II Cor. 1: 11**

**How can I apply the admonition to "pray without ceasing" in my daily life? If I do not already observe this, what are the factors which are hindering me?
(chapter four) Luke 18: 1-7 IThes. 5: 16-18**

Do I express love for others who are not of my liking or who are simply unlike myself and my friends? Do I love family members equally? Neighbors? Co-workers? Community members? Is my love for others spiritually pure, that is, without self-interest? (chapter four) Matt. 5: 43-48 Romans 12: 10-16 I Thes. 5: 12-15

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 2

Do I earnestly strive to free myself from all venial sin and to seek what is most perfect? Have I made good use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to achieve this? Do I pray for my confessor, and all others as well? (chapter 5) John 15: 1-8 I Cor. 10: 1-13 Ephes. 5: 8-10, 15-17

RESPOND: Find some visible way to remind yourself to pray for our Holy Mother Church.

Concentrate each week on correcting a particular venial sin.

Practice some form of poverty each day, in clothing, food, words or other.

Make a friendly overture to someone you dislike, or who is unpopular.

Make a special sacrifice for your confessor(s).

RESPOND: Make a special visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and ask him to help the defenders of the Church; the good theologians, preachers, the Catholic League, etc.)

Make a bookmark or other visible reminder quoting St. Teresa: “Poverty that is chosen for God alone has no need of pleasing anyone but Him.” Try to conform your daily choices to this counsel. (housing, clothing, food, words, etc.) chapter 2

On any particular day, make a concerted effort to “pray without ceasing”. Referring everything that happens, and that you do loan on-going conversation with the Lord would be one way. Repeating a short prayer every little while would be another way. (“Jesus, Mary, save souls !”, or “Lord, have mercy on our world.”)

Keep a record of your trials and sufferings this month, and resolve not to speak and complain of them. How well did you succeed in each? chapter 3

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 2

REACT: What is the best thing to say or do in the following cases?

- 1. A confessor who does not want you to confess venial sins or imperfections. chapter 5**
- 2. You see that someone in the Community is being ignored or left out in some way. chapter 5**
- 3. You have asked the Lord for help in a temporal need and have not received help. What should your attitude to this be?**
- 4. In spite of (or perhaps because of) your attempts to practice virtue, you are being criticized on all sides. What should your internal and external reactions be?**

THE WAY OF PERFECTION Lesson 3

READ: Chapters six through eleven (6-11)

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal on each of the following thoughts and scripture passages:

Toward what end is my love of others directed? Can I honestly say that I am only concerned for their eternal destiny? (chapter 6) John 17: 9-11

Am I more inclined to give than to receive? If so, what is my motivation? Could it be that I simply don't want to feel "obligated" to others? (chapter 6) I Tim. 6:17-19

Do I gently admonish those I love when they deviate from the path of truth, or am I afraid of losing their affection? (chapter 7) Col. 3:16 Heb. 5:2, 3 James 5:20

Am I compassionate with others in what seem to me to be their rather small trials and sufferings? (chapter 7) Ephes. 4:32

When a superior is harsh with me, do I keep this to myself? (exception: humbly approaching the superior concerning the matter) (chapter 7) I Cor. 6:12,13

Do I try to practice the virtues which are opposite the faults of those around me? (chapter 7) Gal. 6:9 Gal. 6: 13-26

Do I try to relieve others of work insofar as possible for me? (chapter 7) Heb. 13:16 Gal. 5:13, 14

Do I desire to be with relatives and friends who are not spiritual persons, for my own enjoyment and consolation? (chapter 8) Matt. 10:37

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(continued) The Way of Perfection Lesson 3

Do I neglect mortification out of undue concern for bodily health? (chapter 10) Eccles. 7:2 I Cor. 9:26, 27

How much importance do I give to the pleasures and comforts the world has to offer?

How important are my possessions to me? (chapter 10) James 4:3,4 I John 2:15-17 Romans 8:6-9 Phil. 3:7,8 Col. 3:1-4

Do I habitually complain about my minor illnesses, aches and pains? (chapter 11) Prov. 15:15 II Cor. 4: 16-18

Do I allow myself too much bodily comfort? (chapter 11) II Cor. 6: 4, 5

RESPOND: Keep notes on your progress in the following efforts:

Examine your love for a particular family member in light of what you have learned in chapters 6-8. Make any needed resolution concerning this relationship.

Pray (a Rosary or other prayer) for someone who is suffering a trial, asking God to give *him/her* patience and merit in the trial.

Choose a fault which irritates you in another person you associate with, and make a great effort to practice the corresponding virtue.

Try to relieve someone you know of a task that is theirs, in order to show love, and to give him or her some extra rest and relaxation.

Make a conscious effort to be open to learning from others, by careful listening and asking questions when appropriate. (See James 1:19, and Phillip. 2:1-11)

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Do some job you have been neglecting because it is distasteful to you, or a lot of trouble.

REPLY: Fill in the blanks with appropriate answers, after finishing the reading assignment.

Some qualities of pure, spiritual love: It does not seek its own

_____.

It _____ dearly. It prefers to _____ rather

than _____. It does not seek any _____.

On detachment: We must strive to rid ourselves of love for our own _____.

A very difficult detachment is from doing our own _____. We should not desire to be

with our relatives for our own _____ but rather in order to _____ them in some manner.

On suffering: We should make a greater effort to suffer and _____ in

silence and with patience.

On becoming less selfish: We should be quick to put aside our own _____ for

the benefit of others. We should _____ to the wishes and preferences of others

instead of insisting on our own way. It is our duty to provide for the needs of our relatives,

especially our _____ and immediate family.

READ: Chapters twelve through eighteen (12-18)

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal on each of the following thoughts and scripture passages:

Interior mortification consists in not giving in to our own wills and desires, even in little things... losing concern about ourselves and our own satisfaction. In what ways can I mortify my will, my desires today? In the days immediately ahead? (chapter 12) Romans 7: 14-17

Do I have any esteem for honor, rank or wealth? How much have these meant to me in the past? St. Teresa says I will never grow much or come to enjoy the fruits of prayer if these things are important to me. (chapter 12) Wisdom 7: 7-11

When wrongs are done to me, what is my reaction? Do I consider that I deserve much worse because of my sinfulness (past or present)? St. Teresa says it calls for great humility to be silent when condemned without fault. The truly humble person *must* desire to be held in little esteem. (chapters 12, 13, 15) Mark 15:3-5 Mark 15; 16-20

Meditation is the basis for acquiring all the virtues. How faithful am I being to this practice? (chapter 16) Psalm 63: 1-8 Psalm 62: 1,2

Do I suffer all things with love? Am I courageous and unafraid of trials? I will not go far unless this is true. (chapter 18) II Timothy 2: 3

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It is a great good to think we may become saints *with God's help*. Am I discouraged by my imperfections? (chapter 16) Psalm 43: 3,4

Do I always try to take the lowest place? What are the advantages of this? Matt. 20: 25-28 (chapter 17)

Do I realize the importance of obedience? (to the Constitutions? to my confessor? to the Church? to my spouse? to lawful authority?) Heb. 13: 17

When I am hurt or offended, do I look immediately to the Passion of our Lord, and consider how he bore his pains and insults while being completely innocent and undeserving of them? 1Peter 2: 19-23

Do I trust the leadership of the Community and its assistant to help discern whether or not I have a vocation as a secular Discalced Carmelite, and if I do, whether or not I belong in this particular Community?

REPLY: Fill in the blanks below.

St. Teresa suggested doing things which go contrary to your _____ in order to mortify

the _____ (ch. 12, sec. 7) She believed that the Lord would highly favor the one who has

real _____ (ch. 14) In a Community much information is necessary

before _____ new members and along before admitting them to

profession. (ch. 14, sec. 2) It should not matter to us when we are blamed by others when

in God's presence we are without _____ (ch. 15) There cannot be _____ without

love, nor are these two virtues possible without detachment from all _____ (ch. 16)

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(continued) The Way of Perfection Lesson 4

The King (Jesus) does not give _____ except to those who give themselves
_____ to him. (ch. 16, sec. 4) Everything that is suffered with love is

_____ again. (ch. 16, sec. 7) Sometimes the Lord comes very late and
_____ just

as well. (ch. 17, sec. 2) _____ in prayer are not necessary in order
to

advance in perfection. (ch. 17, sec. 3) Teresa believed that the Lord would give
infused

prayer (contemplation) if _____ and _____ are truly present. (ch. 17, sec. 7)

Our Lord wants to lead those whom he greatly loves by the path of _____.
(ch. 18, sec. 1) If we fail in the virtue of _____ we will never become
contemplatives. (ch. 18, sec. 8)

THE WAY OF PERFECTION Lesson 5

READ: Chapters nineteen through twenty-five (19-25)

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal on each of the following thoughts and Scripture passages:

Do I persevere in prayer despite the restlessness of mind and soul of which Teresa speaks? (chapter 19) Psalm 138:7, 8

By serving more (especially in suffering and affliction) I shall merit the capacity to enjoy God more. (chapter 19) Romans 12:11-13

Teresa claims that all who do not falter on the way will drink the living water (infused or contemplative prayer) How much do I desire this, and how determined am I not to become discouraged when prayer is difficult? (chapter 19) John 4:7-15 John 7:37,38

Does Teresa's admonishment to the nuns not to hide their feelings about God apply to me as a Secular Carmelite? To what extent is God my business and language? (chapter 20) II Tim. 4:1,2 Jer. 1:6-10

Teresa says it is not our business to teach anyone the language of God, but to tell about the riches that are to be gained by learning it! (chapter 20) Romans 14:1 Romans 15:1,2

How great is my resolve to persevere in prayer until reaching the end when work is involved and criticism arises? (chapter 21) Mt. 10: 34-39 Psalm 40: 1-3

Do I firmly believe what Mother Church holds? (the Holy Father and the Magisterium) (chapter 21) Hebrews 13:17 II Tim. 4:34 I Thes. 5: 12, 13

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 5

Do I think of other things while speaking with God? (chapter 22) Psalm 62:1, 2

REPLY: Give brief answers to the questions below:

1. What are the three properties of water to which Teresa refers? (chapter 19)

2. What is the paradox of the water (tears) that flows in prayer?

3. Is there any reasoning (with the intellect) in the prayer of living water which Teresa describes? (chapter 19)

4. What temptation does Teresa believe one will have who experiences extreme thirst for God? (chapter 19)

5. With what thought can a person in the above situation (no. 4) assuage this desire and affliction? (chapter 19)

6. What two kinds of prayer did Teresa say her daughters needed? (chapter 21)

7. Did Teresa believe that the nature of mental prayer is determined by whether or not the mouth is closed? Explain your answer. (chapter 22)

8. What two exceptions does Teresa allow for abandoning mental prayer for a day or so? (chapter 23)

9. Of what value is the *experience* of God's goodness, as opposed to knowing him through faith alone? (chapter 23)

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 5

10. What advice does Teresa give to those who experience days of severe temptation in prayer? (that is to say, restlessness of soul which makes it very difficult to pray) (chapter 23)

11. Can one be raised to perfect contemplation while reciting a vocal prayer? If so, how? (chapter 25)

READ: Chapters twenty-six through thirty-one (26-31)

REPLY: Give brief answers to the questions which follow:

1. With what three acts does Teresa say mental prayer should begin? (chapter 26)

2. How does she say we should think of the Lord when we begin to pray? What aid to this does she suggest we carry with us if needed? (chapter 26)

3. For those who have difficulty becoming recollected Teresa also suggest doing what? (chapter 26)

4. Where did St. Augustine ultimately find God, after searching for him everywhere? (chapter 26)

5. What is Teresa's definition of a prayer of "recollection"? (chapter 28)

6. Why does she say the eyes should be closed while praying? (chapter 28)

7. What does Teresa say about the Lord's treatment of those who are afflicted and despised? (if they trust in him alone) (chapter 29)

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 6

- 8. Is the prayer of recollection of which Teresa speaks a silence of the faculties? (that is, the intellect, memory and will) If not, what is it? (chapter 30)**

- 9. When the Lord himself calms our faculties and quiets the soul, what is this prayer called? (chapter 31)**

- 10. Can we procure this kind (see no. 9) of prayer through our own efforts? (chapter 31)**

- 11. Describe the effects of the prayer of quiet. (chapter 31)**

- 12. Can this condition (or prayer state) last more than a short time? (chapter 31)**

- 13. What does Teresa suggest we do to foment this prayer of quiet? Fill in the blanks:
find more _____, and speak a gentle _____ from time to time if needed. (chapter 31)**

- 14. If the intellect should become disturbed in this prayer of quiet, Teresa suggests that we not _____ (chapter 31)**

- 15. What main difference does Teresa point out between the prayer of quiet and a more advanced state of prayer? (chapter 31, section 10)**

- 16. Does one who experiences the prayer of quiet have to be already completely detached from the world? (chapter 31)**

- 17. What will happen if the person experiencing this prayer does not strive for greater detachment and virtue?**

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 6

RESPOND: Keep a list during one week of all the things with which your mind is occupied other than with God. Later mark those which seem to you to be caused by worry, which indicates lack of trust in God, or by attachments to people and things .

REFLECT: Meditate/journal for a few minutes of each of the following thoughts:

In the measure I desire the Lord I will find him. “Lord, wherever you go, I will go; whatever you suffer, I will suffer”. (chapter 26) John 12:26 Luke 22: 28-30

There is no edifice as beautiful as a soul pure and full of virtues. May God dwell in my soul as in a palace adorned with resplendent jewels! (ch. 28) Songs 4, all

God does not give himself completely until we give ourselves completely. How detached am I from worldly interests? (chapter 28) Psalm 63:11,12 Sirach 35: 12,13

Have I provided sufficient solitude and silence in my daily routine to be able to become recollected easily? Psalm 63:1-8 Isaiah 57:14, 15 Mt. 6:6 Psalm 131

REACT: Defend this statement from Teresa’s point of view:
“All quiet prayer is not the prayer of quiet.”

READ: Chapters thirty-two through thirty-six (32-36)

REFLECT; Meditate/Journal on each of the following thoughts and Scripture passages:

When I pray “Thy will be done”, am I truly ready to suffer whatever trials the Lord permits? Do I really believe that he will give me the strength I need to endure them? (chapter 32) Mt. 22: 42,43 Psalm 27; 4-6 Luke 6: 20-22

How grateful am I for “my daily bread”? Do I remain in loving awareness of the Lord’s presence after receiving him in Holy Communion, or do I rush away unnecessarily to other occupations? (chapters 34, 35) I Cor. 2: 14 I Cor. 11:23-30

How do I see the wrongs and persecutions I suffer from others? Do I have the humility to realize how much worse I deserve? Do I look at our innocent Lord and imitate his humility in the face of offenses against me? (chapter 36) Romans 14:10,11 Romans 12:14, and 15:1-6

How concerned am I about being esteemed by others? By being honored, for whatever reason? How proud am I of my lineage or other areas in which I might take pride? (chapter 36) II Cor.11:30,31 IICor.12: 9,10

How quickly and how well do I forgive others when they let me down or offend me? (chapter 36) Luke 6: 37,38 Romans 12; 14-21

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 7

REACT: Tell briefly what you plan to do, and the attitude you hope to have if the following situations arise:

- 1. You lose a possession which has had great sentimental value to you:**

- 2. You learn that a friend or relative has made an unkind remark about you:**

- 3. You are unable to receive Holy Communion because of upcoming medical tests:**

- 4. Someone praises you effusively for something you have done well:**

- 5. Some people you are with are talking about their important ancestors and/or other relatives:**

REPLY: Write brief answers to the following:

- 1. To what did Teresa refer when she said we should “make a virtue of necessity”?
(ch. 32)**

- 2. Teresa said we would never drink from the fount of living water .contemplation .
unless we give entirely to the Lord what faculty of ourselves? (chapter 32)**

- 3. Why did St. Teresa say the Lord sometimes places one in a state of “rapture”?
(ch. 32)**

- 4. What virtue did she say was sure to soon follow a person’s entrance into true
contemplative prayer? (chapter 36)**

- 5. What did Teresa say is completely beyond our power? (ch. 32)**

THE WAY OF PERFECTION Lesson 8

READ: Chapters thirty-seven through forty-two (37-42)

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts and Scriptures:

St. Teresa summed up the marvels of our Lord's Prayer in chapter 37, saying that it contains the entire good that a spiritual soul can desire here below. How reverently and devoutly I should pray this treasure which came to us from the mouth of Jesus !
Luke 11:2-4 Mt. 6: 9-15

I should never become proud or have overconfidence about any virtue I may have acquired because the Lord can take it away as quickly and easily as he gave it! Instead, let me consider myself poor in virtue, relying always on the Lord to aid me in my misery. (chapter 38) Proverbs 20:9 Prov. 16:2 and 18 Prov. 27:1,2
Jude 1:24,25 Ps. 141:3,4 Mt. 12:43-45

True humility (concerning my sins) comes with peace and calm, with great trust in God's mercy. (ch. 39) Ps. 86:1-7 Ps. 103: 1-5 I John 2:1,2 Jer.3:12,13 Lam. 3:22-26

If I am just entering into a more spiritual way of life I must be very careful to avoid all occasions of sin; the devil will tempt me to believe that I will never return to my past faults and worldly pleasures. (ch. 39) Sir. 18:27 Prov. 16:17
Prov. 13:20 Prov. 4:25-27 I Peter 5:8,9

Let me always keep in mind the hour of my death. How beautiful to arrive there, having loved God above all things! (ch.40) Sir. 35:6-13 I Peter 1:17 Col. 3:1-4

Is my speech and behavior around others such that my presence contributes to their restraint? (chapter 41) Prov.1 0:19-21 Prov. 25:11,12

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 8

**Is my company and conversation such that others will desire my manner of living and acting so that it is not constrained and judgmental, but joyful and sociable?
(chapter 41)**

Prov. 16:21,23,24

James 3:13,17

REPLY: Write brief answers to the following questions:

- 1. What comparison does St. Teresa make between soldiers and the souls who have reached perfection? (ch. 38)**

- 2. Which kind of enemy should we fear most? (ch. 38)**

- 3. What advice does Teresa give concerning spiritual delights in prayer? (ch. 38)**

- 4. How can the devil deceive us concerning virtue? (ch. 38)**

- 5. If we do not walk in true humility concerning our virtues, what will the Lord do? (ch. 38)**

- 6. When the Lord truly grants us a solid virtue, what comes in its wake? (ch. 38)**

- 7. What two harms can come from undue disturbance over one's sins? (ch. 39)**

- 8. What good effect does true humility (concerning sin) have on a person? (ch. 39)**

- 9. In regard to doing penance for our sins, where does Teresa say the greatest perfection lies?**

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The Way of Perfection Lesson 8

10. Teresa recommends that our prayer, no matter how sublime, should always begin and end with what? (ch. 39)

11. What famous metaphor does Teresa use to describe our stay here on earth? (ch. 40)

12. Teresa warns us to be most careful not to commit what kind of sins advertantly? (ch. 41)

13. In regard to speech, of what does Teresa warn us? (oh. 41)

14. What desire did Teresa say was a clear sign for contemplatives that the favors they receive in prayer are from God? (ch. 42)