

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS**

**READ:** Foreword, General Introduction, and Note on the Drawing by St. John of the Cross, Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition pages 7-38 in the 1991 edition, pages 13-40 in the 1979 edition.

**REFLECT:** Pray for the help of St. John of the Cross in understanding his teachings. Ask for his special help during the time you are studying his works.

Meditate on the total dedication and self-giving evident in the life of our saint, and how his only desire was for God.

Give thanks to the Lord for his goodness in giving us such a remarkable saint to guide us in our spiritual journey.

Reflect on how the Bible was John's most cherished reading source, and how he referred everything to Holy Scripture. How important is Holy Scripture in your life at this time?

Reflect on how completely St. John of the Cross trusted in God's providential care, and how he refused to worry. Can you say this is true of yourself?

Meditate on how the Blessed Sacrament was for St. John of the Cross "all his glory, all his happiness far surpassing all the things of the earth". How much importance do you give the Blessed Sacrament in your daily life?

Meditate on his love of cleanliness and of manual labor. Examine your life in these respects.

**RESPOND:** Make a list of five things you learned about St. John of the Cross from this reading:

List three of his virtues that you would like to imitate this month, with God's help.

Make a novena to St. John of the Cross, using whatever prayers you like.

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE Lesson I**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle -Introduction, Prologue and Poem -The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross - (Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition)**

**REPLY: Connect with numbers the phrases that belong together:**

“mystical understanding”	in the purgative way
source of some of the elements of the poem	the nuns at Beas
the kind of knowledge imparted to the soul	contemplation
the commentary was written for them	in the illuminative way
redaction of the poem used by Rodriguez-Kavanaugh	The Song of Songs
beginners	in the unitive way
proficients	only desire of the perfect
perfect	Canticle B
beatific vision	loving knowledge

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**The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson I**

**Answer the following questions briefly: (answers will be found in the Introduction)**

- 1. Why is the knowledge imparted to the soul in contemplation called ‘hidden’?**
  
- 2. Does the knowledge of contemplation give a clear vision of God or the divine truths?**
  
- 3. What metaphor is used to describe this hidden or secret aspect of contemplation?**
  
- 4. Does God communicate himself to the soul through the knowledge it has of him or through the love it has from this knowledge?**
  
- 5. Can one have the experience of contemplation and be unable to express it?**
  
- 6. Which are more adequate in expressing John’s experience: his poetic figures and similies, or his rational explanations?**
  
- 7. What does the forward movement of the poem mark out for us?**
  
- 8. Is the order of the poem strictly chronological?**
  
- 9. Where was St. John of the Cross when he first began to fashion the verses in his mind?**
  
- 10. List the four main aspects of the life of love included in the poem.**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle, Stanzas 1 through 4**

**RELECT: Use these Scriptures for your meditation time: Rom. 1:20 & 13:11-14  
Ps. 34:4-10      EccI. 1:1-11      Mt. 7:13, 14      Col. 3:1-4**

**Give prayerful attention to the following questions:**

**Have I truly sought the Lord in faith and love, without desire for satisfaction, good feelings, or understanding which is not needed?**

**Have I done all that I can through my own efforts and works, (such as mortifications and penances, and practicing the virtues) or do I only give lip service to God? Does my “love” for him really *cost me something*?**

**Do I let trials and temptations disturb and discourage me?**

**How can I use the beauty and majesty of God’s creation to quicken my desire to enter more fully into his mysteries? Do I make time to retire to places of beauty and solitude which inspire me?**

**REPLY: Find answers in the reading material for the following questions:**

**1. Of what is the soul complaining in the first stanza?**

**2. What is she seeking?**

**3. What important warning does St. John of the Cross give concerning the experience of God’s presence and his communications to the soul? (Stanza 1)**

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**The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson 2**

4. What are some of the realizations at which the soul has arrived in Stanza 1?
5. Where is God hidden? (Stanza 1)
6. How, then, must we seek him? (Stanza 1)
7. When can a person truly call God his Beloved? (Stanza 1)
8. What do the “wounds of love” cause? (Stanza 1)
9. What are some of the proofs of the soul’s love for God? (Stanza 2)
10. What are some of the things the soul must do to find her Beloved? (Stanza 1)
11. What practice is the first requirement for advancing to the knowledge of God? (Stanza 4)

**Match the following metaphors and their meanings by numbers:**

**mountains**

**rebellions of the flesh**

**sheepfolds**

**desires and affections**

**green meadows**

**elements and creatures**

**wild beasts**

**God**

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**The Spiritual Canticle**      **Lesson 2**

**watersides**

**gratifications**

**frontiers**

**the angels**

**strong men**

**the world**

**shepherds**

**the heavens**

**flowers (Stanza 2)**

**virtues**

**hill**

**the devils**

**woods and thickets**

**the Bridegroom**

**stag**

**mortifications and penance**

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE**

**Lesson 3**

**READ:** The Spiritual Canticle, Stanzas 5 through 11, and commentary

**RELECT:** Use these Scriptures for your meditation time:      Songs 3:1-3 & 2:8-10  
II Cor. 5:1-9              Ps. 63:1-3              Ps. 42 Ps. 13:1,2              Ps. 19:1-4  
Ps. 27:7-9 & 13,14

Give prayerful attention to the following questions:

Do I feel that God “owes” me something - some reward for my faithfulness to his commandments, or for my good works? Do I desire or hope for any reward for my service other than the perfect love of God?

What are the things and people in which I seek pleasure and satisfaction? What things cause me disappointment? In short, where *is* my personal treasure? Is it truly in God?

How do I feel about death - in particular my own death? What is lacking for me to be able to die a *happy* death?

**REPLY:** Answer the following questions briefly and fill in the blanks below:

From Stanza 5: The “thousand graces” refers to the multitude

of \_\_\_\_\_ . Through them one can track down

God’s \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .

God elevated all creation through the \_\_\_\_\_ and clothed them wholly in

beauty and dignity through the \_\_\_\_\_ of his Son.

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**The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson 3**

**From Stanza 6: Creatures give the soul signs of her \_\_\_\_\_,**

**increasing her sorrow at his \_\_\_\_\_ . All the knowledge of God**

**possible in this life is \_\_\_\_\_, because it is only**

**\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**From Stanza 7: The three ways of suffering for the Beloved are like a**

**\_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_. Angels and**

**men alone among all creatures are \_\_\_\_\_ to engage in knowing and loving**

**God. One of the most outstanding favors God can give is to make one know that he**

**cannot be completely \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**1. What is the soul's complaint in Stanza 8?**

**2. How does she feel that the bodily life affects her spiritual life? (Stanza 8)**

**3. What would the soul like for God to do to heal her wound of love? (Stanza 8)**

**4. What are the signs that the heart has been truly stolen by God? (Stanza 9)**

**5. What are three traits of the soul who is "sick" with love of God? (Stanza 10)**

**6. God is present in a person in what three ways? (Stanza 11)**

**7. How does the soul that loves God above all else think of death? (Stanza 11)**

**8. When does love reach perfection? (Stanza 11)**

**9. If one does not feel the sickness of love (for God) what two things could this show?  
(Stanza 11)**

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**The Spiritual Canticle**

**Lesson 3**

**RESPOND; If you are at all creative, attempt writing a poem about the beauty of God's creation, or paint (or draw) something to illustrate your feelings about his handiwork. If you can sing or play an instrument you might praise God through music.**

**If you cannot do either of the above, take time out for a little stroll in the woods, or other place of natural beauty, giving thanks to God for his natural gifts.**

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE                      Lesson 4**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle Stanzas 12 through 15**

**REFLECT: Prayerfully read I Cor. 13:4-7. Now take one phrase at a time and meditate/journal on the degree in which it can be found in your soul. Make any needed resolution.**

**Also for meditation:     Sirach 24:19-21 and Songs 5:2-8.**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. What is the only means by which one reaches true union and spiritual espousal with God? (Stanza 12:2)**
  
- 2. What occurs in the union and transformation of love? (Stanza 12:7)**
  
- 3. What is the difference between transformation in this life and transformation in glory? (Stanza 12:8)**
  
- 4. What suffering does the soul experience within at this time? (Stanza 13:1)**
  
- 5. What causes the soul to cry out “Withdraw them, Beloved I” ? Does she really want him to do so? (Stanza 13:4,5)**
  
- 6. What is the “flight” which is mentioned? (Stanza 13:6)**
  
- 7. What does the body feel in this flight? (Stanza 13:6)**
  
- 8. Do those in the state of perfection experience these raptures? (Stanza 13:6)**

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**The Spiritual Canticle                      Lesson 4**

**9. To whom does John refer us for more information on raptures, ecstasies, etc.?  
(Stanza 13:7)**

**10. Why is the love caused by this “flight” appropriately called “a breeze”? (Stanza  
13:11)**

**11. How does God communicate himself to the soul if not by the *knowledge* it has of  
him in contemplation? (Stanza 13:11)**

**12. What name does John give to the state of the soul in this stage? (Stanza 14 and  
15:2)**

**13. What occurs at this time in the soul? What ceases? What begins? (sec. 2)**

**14. Does everyone in the state of spiritual espousal experience all that John  
describes? (sec. 2)**

**15. What properties of a river does the soul experience at this time? With what  
effects? (sec. 9, 10)**

**16. Why does the soul speak of the “rising dawn”? (sec. 23, 24)**

**17. What five traits of the solitary sparrow does the soul exhibit? (in terms of the  
soul, not the sparrow) (sec. 24)**

**18. What is the “supper” which we share with the Lord in contemplation? (sec. 29)**

**19. What differences can be noted between spiritual espousal and spiritual  
marriage? (sec. 30)**

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE                      Lesson 5**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle Stanzas 16 through 21**

**REFLECT: Thinking of your own soul as a garden where the Lord might come to “take his delight”, what flowers of virtue are you preparing for him? Take stock of what you have and what is still lacking for a beautiful, fragrant garden. This meditation should take at least half an hour!**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. What special delight does the soul experience at the stage being described? (16:1)**
  
- 2. How does the devil try to disturb one at this point? What help could be invoked? (16:2,6)**
  
- 3. What is meant by “let no one appear on the hill” ? (16:10)**
  
- 4. What is an intense torment for the soul at this time, and what adds to it? (17:1)**
  
- 5. How does the soul impede spiritual dryness? (17:2)**
  
- 6. What is the “essential communication” which the soul begs for? (19:4)**
  
- 7. What three things are needed for so strong and intimate an embrace from God as that which the soul desires? (20-21:1)**
  
- 8. What does the soul obtain from this union with God? (20-21 :1)**

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The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson 5

**9. What happens to the soul in regard to the *feeling* of compassion? (20-21:10)**

**10. What happens when the soul experiences joyous and happy things? (20-21:12)**

**11. In stanzas 20 and 21, section 19, the soul seems to have arrived at the state she so desired. Now what can she enjoy at *will*?**

See how many of the following metaphors you can connect with their meanings:

girls of Judea

soul's virtues

flowers

sensory disturbances

the amber

spiritual dryness

roses; mountains

riches of the soul given by God

foxes

wanderings of the imagination

waters

impulses and excesses of anger

north wind

restless appetites

south wind

the Bridegroom's Spirit

watching fears of the night

inordinate acts of the faculties

companions

lower, sensory part of the soul

swift-winged birds

emotion of hope

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**The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson 5**

**lions**

**the Holy Spirit's movement**

**siren's song**

**emotion of joy**

**leaping roes**

**emotions of sorrow**

**mountains, lowlands, river banks**

**passion of fear**

**ardors**

**soul's habitual delight**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle Stanzas 22 through 26**

**REFLECT: Read Stanza 26, section 18 and try to identify in yourself any of the “herd” which is described there. It would be good to do a little journaling with this.**

**Meditate on the following question: How much attention do you give to the affairs of others? Think over the past week and try to identify the times when your thoughts (and perhaps even words) were occupied in noticing, comparing, criticizing, complaining about, worrying about, or otherwise fixed upon the doings of others ; in your family, community, workplace, church, etc. In the coming week try to turn your attention to this aspect of your mind, attempting to focus instead upon God and upon your duties and good works.**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. Why is the “spiritual marriage” incomparably greater than the “spiritual espousal”? (22:3, 5)**
- 2. What things has the bride left behind? (22:3)**
- 3. What kind of things does God communicate to the soul in this state? (23:1)**
- 4. How does the devil treat the soul who is in this exalted state? (24:4)**
- 5. What is the property of perfect love? (24:8)**
- 6. What three effects can be seen in the virtues and therefore in the soul? (24:8)**
- 7. What three favors to devoted souls are spoken of in Stanza 25, section 2?**

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**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE      Lesson 6**

8. What is the effect of the “spark” which the Beloved sometimes produces in the soul? (24:5)
  
9. What is the difference between the “spark” and the “spiced wine”? (24:8)
  
10. How are beginners in the service of God like new wine? (24:10)
  
11. How are the “old lovers” like old wine? (24:11)
  
12. What two effects of this wine does the soul note? (26:2)
  
13. How many “wine cellars” of love are there and when are they entered? (26:3)
  
14. How does the transformation affect each of the soul’s faculties? (26:5)
  
15. What is the soul’s attitude now toward the affairs of others and even her own? (26:15)
  
16. How does this “unknowing” affect the soul’s acquired knowledge? (26:16)
  
17. What imperfections, desires, passions, etc. still remain until the soul reaches this state of perfection? (26:18)

**RESPOND:** Thank God for the intimacy to which he has called us, and ask him to work in your own soul the beautiful things which St. John of the Cross describes. (This is what St. Therese of Lisieux did and look what happened !)

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE      Lesson 7**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle      Stanzas 27 through 31**

**REFLECT: How often am I to be found “on the common”? How much time do I waste in conversations? (see 29:6)**

**How much consideration do I give to what others will think or say of me when I undertake some work for love of God? Am I afraid to confess Christ before men?**

**Can I say that “everything I do, I do with love, and everything I suffer, I suffer with the delight of love”? When I reflect on the past few days, what evidence do I find of either?**

**What amount of time do I spend in prayer before going out to do some work for God?**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. What movement does the soul no longer suffer and why? (27:7)**
- 2. Where does the soul employ all her strength and why? (27:8)**
- 3. What is God’s only desire for us? (28:1)**
- 4. What is the property of love spoken of in Stanza 28, section 1?**
- 5. What does the soul mean by her “energy”? (28:4)**
- 6. What effect has the transformation had on the four passions? (28:4)**

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**The Spiritual Canticle      Lesson 7**

7. What does the soul often do without even realizing it? (28:5)
8. Name some of the imperfections the soul had previously. ((28:9)
9. Of what does John say the union of love of God consists? (29:2)
10. How did the soul become “lost to herself”? (29:10)
11. What can be said of works done in dryness of spirit and in hardship? (30:5)
12. Who weaves the “garland of virtues” in the soul? Explain briefly. ((30:6,9)
13. What are the three “garlands” woven by Christ and the Church? (30:7)
14. How does love become so detached and strong that no force or occasion can break it? (31 :6)

**REACT: Consider the importance St. John of the Cross gives to contemplative prayer *within the union of love*. (29:2) Does he mean what he suggests here literally, or is it a use of hyperbole to make his point? Is he speaking of the times when one is actually engaged in this exalted prayer, or at all times once one has arrived at this state? How would either answer correspond with what we know of the life of St. John of the Cross himself? (and St. Teresa, too) Good discussion question !**

**THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE    Lesson 8**

**READ: The Spiritual Canticle Stanzas 32 through 40**

**REFLECT: Re-read Stanza 39, section 7, and remain with it in prayer for a while.**

**St. John of the Cross used “the siege” in speaking of passions and appetites. How well conquered and calmed are my own? Make a few notes after meditation.**

**What efforts am I making to obtain more solitude? What else could I do? Are there some activities I could eliminate?**

**What is my attitude when I recall my past sins? Do they humble me and cause me to be more careful to avoid the occasions of sin in which they occurred? Do they cause me to be more merciful to others? Do they make me more determined never to offend God again? Do they cause me to be grateful for God’s great Mercy?**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. What did the soul behold in God in Stanza 32, section 8?**
- 2. What four goods does God’s gaze produce in the soul? (33:1)**
- 3. Why shouldn’t the soul forget her sins? (33:1)**
- 4. When and why does God grant more grace to the soul? (33:7)**
- 5. Why does the Bridegroom call the soul a “white dove”? (34:3)**
- 6. Through what means has the soul come to this union with God? (35:1-7)**

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(continued)      **The Spiritual Canticle    Lesson 8**

7. What is the ‘thicket” which the soul wishes now to enter? (36:1-13)
  
8. What mysteries does the soul want to penetrate in Stanza 37, sections 1 and 2?
9. What are some of the sublime mysteries of Christ the Rock? (37: 3, 4)
  
10. What two goals does the soul seek in entering these caverns of God’s wisdom in Christ?  
(38:2)
  
11. In what does essential glory lie? (38:5)
  
12. What five things will God bestow in the beatific transformation? (39:2)
  
13. Why does the soul call contemplation “night”? (39:12,13)
  
14. What are the five blessings the soul mentions to the Bridegroom in asking for transformation in glory? (40:1)
  
15. What is the gateway into the riches of God’s wisdom? (36:13)

**RESPOND: Do something beautiful for God today! Keep it a secret!**