

# The Book of Her Life

New Life in Christ

Chapters 23-24

by **St. Teresa of Avila**

## Chapter 23

Returns to the account of her life, of how she began to seek greater perfection, and by what means. For persons trying to guide souls that practice prayer it is helpful to know how these souls much proceed in the beginning. How she profited from knowing about this.

1-I now want to **return** to where I left off about **my life**...This is another, new book from here on- I mean another, new life. This life dealt with up to this point was **mine** ...from the point where I began to explain these things about prayer is the one **God lived in me**...because it would have been impossible in so short a time to get rid of so many **bad habits and deeds**...

2-...when I began to...devote myself to **prayer**, the Lord...started to grant me **favours**. His Majesty began to give me the **prayer of quiet**...and often the **prayer of union** ... I experienced wonderful delight and sweetness, often without being able to avoid it...this delight was from God...and I came out of it much **improved** and **strengthened**. But ... I began to fear ... whether the devil ...wanted me to **suspend the intellect** to draw me away from mental prayer...I didn't understand this prayer.

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3-...His Majesty desired to **enlighten** me so that I might no longer **offend** Him... fear increased...and made me seek out spiritual persons to consult...I didn't feel **worthy** to speak to members of the Society of Jesus or strong enough to **obey**...

4-...after a great struggle within me and many tears, I resolved to talk to a spiritual person (to ask him what **prayer** I was **experiencing** ...) and to do all I could not to offend God...the devil knows that the complete **remedy** for a soul lies in **consulting the friends of God**; I didn't have the **determination** to do this. I was waiting to amend first...I had fallen into little **bad habits** ... and I was unable to understand they were bad. I **needed the help of others** ... a hand to lift me up...

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5-...the **prayer** was **increasing**...I understood that I was experiencing something **supernatural** because sometimes I was unable to resist...I resolved to strive for **purity of conscience**...I saw, after trying it for some days, that my soul didn't have the strength to reach such **perfection** alone on account of **attachments**...that were enough to spoil everything.

6-They told me about a **learned priest**...I tried to get to speak to him through the help of a **saintly gentleman**...

7-...this **blessed man** was the principle means by which my soul was **saved**...

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8-In this way, I arranged that the learned priest ...would come to speak to me...when the blessed man brought him to speak with me, I was most embarrassed to find myself in the presence of so holy a man, and I gave him an **account of my soul and my prayer**...He began to guide me as though I were a **strong person**...When I saw him at once so **determined about little things** that I didn't have the **fortitude** to give up immediately and so perfectly, I was afflicted...He was taking my soul's **attachments** as something I would have to **die to all at once**, I realized there was need for much more caution.

9- In sum, I understood that the means he gave me were not the ones by which I could **remedy my situation**, because they were suited to a more **perfect soul**. Though **advanced in receiving favors** from God, I was very much at the **beginning with regard to virtue and mortification**...

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9-cont'd...If I had had no one but him to speak to I believe my soul would never have improved. The **affliction** I felt in seeing that I did not do-nor did it seem I could do –that which he told me would have been enough to make me lose hope and give up everything...what happened was all for my **greater good**, that I might get to know and deal with people ...of the Society of Jesus.

10-...I arranged that the **holy man come to see me**...He began to visit me, encourage me and tell me that I shouldn't think I could give up everything in one day, that **little by little God would do the work**...these things are so important in the beginning to help a soul and show it how to fly...this gentleman was my complete **salvation**...and had patience while seeing I wasn't making amends in everything...

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11-Since he was getting to know my very **great imperfections** ... and since I mentioned to him the **favours** granted me by God so that he could give me **light**, he told me that my **imperfections** were **incompatible** with the **favours** and that these favours were bestowed on persons who **were already very advanced and mortified** ... it seemed to him that in some things there was a **bad spirit**...although he didn't come to a definite conclusion...The **difficulty** was that I didn't know how to say either little or much about my prayer; for only recently **did God give me this favor of understanding what it is and knowing how to speak about it.**

12-...I felt greatly afflicted and shed many tears...I could never persuade myself that the devil was the cause...looking through books in order to...explain the prayer I was experiencing, I found...*Ascent of the Mount*...

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12- cont'd...it touches on **union of the soul** with God, **all the signs I experienced** in not thinking of anything. This was what I was most often saying: that **when I experienced that prayer I wasn't able to think of anything**. I marked the pertinent passages and gave him the book so that he and the other priest...might look it over and tell me what I should do, and that if they thought I should, I would give up prayer completely ...but I had already experienced what my soul was without prayer...I saw danger everywhere... It was a very **severe trial**...although it may seem unimportant ... perhaps it will be helpful to **understand how the spirit must be tried**.

13-...it is a great one, the trial that is suffered; I am suffering a bitter trial because some persons with whom I have discussed my prayer are not keeping it secret...they have spread things that should remain very secret...



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14- Since I gave them the book and an account of my sins as best I could...the two servants of God considered with great charity what was fitting for me. I awaited the answer...and finally the considered opinion of both of them was that the cause was the devil. They told me to take the matter up with a priest from the Society of Jesus...and that I shouldn't neglect anything he might tell me, because I was in serious danger if I didn't have someone to guide me.

15- ...not knowing what would become of me...I read...what St. Paul said, that God was very **faithful**, that He would never let those who love Him be **deceived** by the devil. This consoled me very deeply...I began to prepare my general confession and put down in writing all the good and bad things—as clear an account as I knew how to give, without leaving anything out...what **obstacles and fears** the devil places in the path of the **one who wants to reach God!**

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16- After I spoke with the servant of God from the Society of Jesus...he explained to me what I was experiencing and greatly encouraged me. He said it was recognizably from **God's Spirit**, but that ...the prayer didn't have a good **foundation**, and that I had not begun to understand **mortification** ...He wondered if the Lord didn't desire to **do good for many persons through me**...it seems he **prophesied** what the Lord afterward did with me, and pointed out that I would be at fault if I didn't respond to the favors God was granting me...it seemed to me that the Holy Spirit was speaking through Him to heal me.

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17-...he guided me by means that seemed to **change me completely**. ...He told me that I should devote prayer each day to a phase of the **Passion**, that I should benefit from this prayer and dwell only on the **humanity**, and that I should **resist** those experiences of **recollection** and **consolations** as much as I could ... until he told me otherwise.

18- He left me consoled and encouraged...I remained **determined** not to lapse from his orders...My **soul began to improve** noticeably...

## Chapter 24

Continues on the same topic. Tells how her soul made progress after she began to obey, how little it helped her to resist God's favors, and how His Majesty began giving her more perfect ones.

1-My soul was left so docile from this confession ... As a consequence I began to make many **changes**...it seemed that the confessor thought all the changes of little importance. And this urged me more for he guided my soul by stressing the **love of God** and allowed freedom and used no pressure if I didn't set about doing things **out of love**...I was trying to **resist** ...all the **gifts** and **favors** of God. In **exterior** the change was apparent because the Lord began to grant me the courage to practice some **renunciation** ... When compared to my previous life it was **extreme**...But as for my obligation of the habit I wore and my profession, it **fell short**.

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2-...In the past, I had thought that to receive **favors** in prayer much **seclusion** was necessary ... I saw how little such effort mattered. The more I strove to **distract** myself, the more the Lord enveloped me in that **sweetness and glory**...there was no escape. The Lord was more careful in granting me favors and in revealing Himself to me...that I might better understand it was **no longer in my power to resist Him**.

I started again to love the **most sacred humanity**. **Prayer** started to take place as an edifice that had a **foundation**; I grew fond of more **penance**... That holy man who heard my confession told me ... that perhaps God gave me so much sickness since I didn't do **penance**. He ordered me to do some **mortifications** ... I obeyed him. My soul began to feel any **offense** I committed against God, however small, that if I were holding onto something, I could not **recollect** myself until I had given up that thing. I prayed the Lord might keep me in His hands... that He would not allow me to **turn back**...

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3-At that time Father Francis came to this place...He had given up all and entered the Society of Jesus...he was advancing in the favors and gifts of God...

...after he heard me, he told me that my **experiences** were from the **Spirit of God** and that it seemed to him it would no longer be good to resist and that I should always begin prayer with an event from the **Passion**, but that if afterward the Lord should carry away the spirit I ought not resist Him... well advanced in prayer, he gave me the medicine and the counsel, for **experience** in this matter is very important...I left greatly consoled...

4- ...they transferred my confessor... I thought I would return to my wretchedness ... my soul was left as though in a desert...very fearful... The Lord was pleased that I become friendly with a **widow** of high nobility who practiced prayer and was a very close friend of members of the Society. She made me confess to her own confessor, and I stayed at her house for many days... by merely listening to the holiness of their conversation, my soul felt great benefit.

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5- This father began to lead me to **greater perfection**. He told me that to please God completely I must **leave nothing undone** ... my soul still was not at all strong but very fragile, especially with regard to giving up some **friendships** I had. Although I was not offending God by then, I was very attached, and it seemed to me it would be ingratitude to abandon them... I questioned why I should have to be ungrateful to abandon them... One day, having spent a long time in prayer and begging the Lord to help me please him in all things, I began the *Veni Creator*; while saying it, a **rapture** came upon me so suddenly that it almost carried me out of myself... It was the **first time** the Lord granted me this favor of rapture. I heard these words: "**No longer do I want you to converse with men but with angels.**"...

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6-These words have been **fulfilled**, for I have never again been able to tie myself to any friendship or to find consolation in or bear particular love for another person than those I understand love Him and strive to serve Him; ... If I am not aware that the person seeks to love and serve God or to speak about prayer, it is a **painful cross** for me to deal with him...

7- From that day on I was very courageous in abandoning all for God...My confessor had to wait for God to do the work...In this **rapture** the Lord gave me the **freedom and the strength to perform the task...**

8- May God be blessed forever, in an instant He gave me the **freedom** that with all the efforts of many years could not attain by myself, often trying to force myself that my health had to pay dearly. Since it was accomplished by him who is the powerful and true Lord of all, **I felt no pain.**

AMEN