

Counsels on Prayer

(ch.5)

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The Book of her Foundations

by Teresa of Avila

Gives some counsels on matters concerning prayer. This chapter is very beneficial for those engaged in active works

...There are many paths along this way of the spirit, It could be that I will manage to say certain useful things about some of them...

Substance of Perfect Prayer

2. I would like to treat of the **substance of perfect prayer**. For some it seems the whole business lies in thinking. If they can keep their mind occupied in God, though with great effort, they think they are spiritual. If, they become distracted they think they are lost.

... It must be understood that not all imaginations are capable of meditating, **but all souls are capable of loving...**

The soul is not the mind, nor is the will directed by thinking... **Hence, the soul's progress does not lie in thinking much but in loving much.**

How to Acquire Love

3. How does one acquire this love? Well, by being **determined to work and to suffer** when the occasion arises.

It is by thinking of what we owe the Lord, of who He is, and what we are, that a soul's determination grows.

This thinking is very meritorious for beginners as long as nothing interferes with **obedience or benefit to one's neighbor**. When either of these **two things** presents itself, time is demanded, and abandonment of what we desire to give God, in other words, to be alone thinking of Him or delighting in the delights that He give us. To leave aside these delights for either of these other **two things** is to give delight to Him and to do the work for Him.

For He Himself said: **What you did for one of these little ones you did for Me.**

In matters related to obedience, He wants the soul who truly loves Him to take His same path.

4. If this is true, where does the displeasure come from when one has not spent as much time withdrawn and absorbed in God, though we are occupied with the other things?

This **first and main one** is subtle **self-love** that doesn't understand what it is to want to please ourselves rather than God.

For, clearly, once the soul tastes how sweet the Lord is, it is more pleasing for the body to be resting without work and for the soul to be receiving delight.

5. If they see that they may play a little part in getting even one soul to make progress, to love God more, or in consoling it, or in taking away a danger from it. How poorly would it rest!

When it cannot help in deed, it will do so with prayer, begging the Lord for the many souls that it is sad to see being lost.

The soul loses its delights and counts the loss as gain. It doesn't think of its own satisfaction but how it can best do the Lord's will, through **obedience**.

It would be distressing if God were clearly telling us to go after something that matters to Him and we don't because looking at Him is more pleasing to us.

What an amusing progress in the love of God, to tie His hands by thinking that He cannot help us except by **one path!**

6. I personally know souls... occupied with so many business matters and things commanded by obedience that it seemed impossible in the midst of such commotion for their spirit to grow.

But, from a soul determined to love You and abandoned into Your hands; You only want that it obey, inquire what is for Your greater service and that it desire this! Its will is Yours and You guide it to where it receives the most benefit.

You go about disposing the soul and its dealings in such a way that it finds itself with spiritual improvement so great that it is left amazed.

7. A few days ago I spoke with someone so busy through obedience with work that he didn't remember having a day for himself. He did however strive to have some daily periods for prayer.

The Lord repaid him well. He has that precious **liberty of spirit** that the **perfect** have. In it, they find all the happiness that could be wanted in this life, for **in desiring nothing, they possess all.**

Nothing on earth do they desire or fear, nor do trials disturb them. In sum, **nothing can take away their peace** because these souls **depend only on God.** Only the fear of losing Him can cause them **pain.**

Everything else in this world neither contributes nor removes anything from their happiness. O happy obedience!

8. I have known others that I had not seen in years. When asked, they said that they had spent their time in **obedience and charity.** There was such improvement in spiritual things I was left amazed.

So don't be sad my daughters when **obedience** draws you to involvement in exterior matters. Know that if it is in the kitchen that the **Lord walks among the pots and pans** helping you both interiorly and exteriorly.

9. A religious resolved never to say "no" to anything his superior commanded no matter what.

One day, completely worn out from work, he went to sit down and rest a little. His superior met him and told him to go and dig in the garden. He remained silent, indeed afflicted. He took his hoe and when he was about to enter the garden, our Lord appeared to him weighed down with the cross. He understood that he was enduring nothing when compared with what the Lord endured.

10. There is no path that leads more quickly to the highest perfect than obedience. So, it is here that the devil sets up many difficulties and annoyances under the color of good...

The highest perfection does not consist in interior delights or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy, but in having our wills so much in conformity with God's that there is nothing we know He wills that we do not want with all our desire, and in accepting the bitter as happily as we do the delightful when we know that His majesty desires it.

It seems difficult to be content with what completely contradicts our nature; and indeed it is! But, love has this strength if it is perfect, for we forget about pleasing ourselves in order to please the one we love.

Though the trials may be very great, they become sweet when we know we are pleasing God. This is how those who have reached this stage love persecution, dishonor, and offense!

11. What I intend to explain is why **obedience** is the quickest way to reach this happy state. The reason is that since we are not lords of our own to be able to employ it purely in God, **obedience** is the true path for subjecting it to **reason.**

Human nature and self-love can find so many reasons not to subject the will to reason, that we would never arrive at the goal. And often the most reasonable thing seems to be foolishness if it is not to our advantage.

12. We would never finish dealing with this interior battle and all the devil, the world and our own desires do to make us twist reason. Well then, what is the remedy?

In obedience, as in litigation, the matter is placed in the hands of a judge ... and we trust the words of the Lord; **Whoever hears you hears Me, and it disregards its own will.**

The Lord esteems this surrender very much because it means making Him Lord over the free will He has given us.

By exercising ourselves in this surrender ... we come to be conformed with what is commanded of us.

It can be a painful exercise, but the Lord helps ... He makes us **lords over our will.**

Being lords of ourselves, we can with perfection be occupied with God, giving Him a **pure will** that he may join to His. We can ask Him to send fire from heaven so that His love may burn this sacrifice and take away all that could displease Him.

We have done our part. We have placed the sacrifice on the altar, although through much hardship. And, insofar as is in our power, the sacrifice remains on the altar and does not touch the ground.

13. In order to acquire this treasure, there is no better way than to excavate from the mine of obedience. The more we submit to men, having no other will than our superiors, the more we shall be lords over our will to bring it into conformity with God's will.

Notice, Sisters, if leaving the pleasure of solitude is not well repaid. It is not because of a lack of solitude that will prevent you from reaching union with God. This is the

union I desire for us all, not some absorption ... If after this suspension not much obedience remains, and self-will is present, it seems to me the soul will be united with its self-love rather than the will of God.

14. The second reason is that in solitude there are fewer occasions to offend the Lord. For if it is fearful of offending Him, it finds the greatest consolation in not having anything to make it stumble. This seems reason enough not to have conversations with anyone unless it's about God's great favors and delights.

15. Here, my daughters, is where love will be seen ... right in the midst of the occasions of falling... It is here that our gain will be greater.

Notice that I am always supposing that all is done out of **obedience or charity**; if not **solitude** is better and we must desire it.

The desire for solitude is continually present in souls that truly love God. Though I say that leaving solitude a gain, because doing so makes us realize who we are and how much virtue we have.

People who are always recollected in solitude, however holy they may think they are, don't know how patient or humble they are.

St. Peter thought he was very courageous; but notice how he acted when the occasion presented itself? Yet, he came through the experience not trusting himself at all, and as a result he trusted in God and subsequently suffered the martyrdom.

16. If only we understood how great our **misery** is! Everywhere there is danger if we don't understand this misery. It is a great good for us when ordered to do things that show us our lowliness. **I consider one day of humble self-knowledge a greater favor from the Lord than many days of prayer.**

The true lover loves everywhere and is always thinking of the Beloved! It would be really hard to bear if we could only pray in some corner somewhere.

Of course, I do realize that in the midst of occupations prayer cannot last many hours; but, Lord, what power over you a **sigh of sorrow from the depths of our heart** seeing that it isn't enough to be in this exile but that we are not even given the chance to be alone enjoying You.

17. Here we see clearly that we are His **slaves**, our wills being sold, out of love for

Him, through the **virtue of obedience**, since through obedience we are in some way giving up enjoying God Himself.

And yet, this is nothing if we consider that He came from His Father out of obedience to become our slave.

How can we repay this favor or render service? It's necessary to be on guard in performance of **good works** by having frequent interior recourse to God even if these works are done in obedience and charity.

It is important to understand that it is not the length of time spent in prayer that benefits one; when the time is spent as well in good works, it is a great help in preparing the soul for the enkindling of love. The soul may be better prepared in a very short time than through many hours of reflection. All must come from His hand. May he be blessed forever. Amen