

**Lift Every Voice Book Club
Contemplative Writers of Color
Hosted by Abbey of the Arts**

A Spiritual Journey with St. Teresa of Avila: God Alone Is Enough
by *Claudia Mair Burney* (now *Claudia Love Mair*)

Questions to Help Guide Reflection

- ❖ Let nothing upset you,
let nothing startle you.
All things pass;
God does not change.
Patience wins
all it seeks.
Whoever has God
Lacks nothing:
God alone is enough. (Page xix)

What does this prayer invite you to consider in your own life?

- ❖ . . . friendship and communion with God are possible by entering your heart, resting in loving stillness, and finally rising above even the heart to God alone. (page 11)

What practices do you have to help you find loving stillness?

- ❖ Teresa indeed stayed there, baptized in tears of penance, letting the waters of her contrition begin to transform her into a woman who would come to know Christ so intimately she'd call him her Beloved. The wounded Christ, savagely scourged, had touched her to her core in a way the Christ of her past, whom she perceived as constantly judging her, had not. (page 17)

What aspect of Christ most moves you?

- ❖ Teresa suffered tremendously, but she never lost touch with her Beloved. She was a genius administrator and spiritual guide, but the sassy nun was humble enough to do kitchen duty. She was fond of saying how easily she found God amid the pots and pans. In fact, Teresa found her Beloved everywhere; his unceasing sweet talk ever sounded in her ears. (page 24)

Through which humble tasks do you find God?

- ❖ Her death is the stuff of legends. It is said that for days before she passed away, the sweet aroma of lilies filled her room. One story claims that at the moment she died a white dove flew from under her bedcovers . . . (page 27)

What of St. Teresa lingers most in your memory of her?

- ❖ The beginner must see himself as making a garden for the delight of his Beloved. But the soil is very barren and full of noxious weeds. His Majesty himself pulls up the weeds and replaces them with good seed. Keep in mind that all this is done before you even set out to learn how to pray. (page 42)

What spiritual gardening do you need to attend to?

- ❖ For her, self-examination takes in the whole soul: who we are and how we live. It is the work that we do to prepare ourselves. Without this holistic approach, how can we truly give ourselves to God? (page 52)

How can we truly give ourselves to God?

- ❖ Humility is like a bee, busy making honey in its hive; it's always working. Without humility, everything goes wrong. But don't forget, the bee continually flies away from the beehive to gather nectar from the flowers. And so the soul must fly from self-knowledge to reflect upon the grandeur and majesty of God. (page 53)

How might you be a more humble person?

- ❖ I suggest that you start a spiritual journal. Not just a notebook of your thoughts, your journal will be your private prayer space. Think of it as a portable monk's cell, or hermitage. It is for you and God alone. (page 56)

What practice would help you start this spiritual journey?

- ❖ What's important is that prayer come alive in our lives, reflecting on the relationship we have with Christ, in us. Living prayer with a living God! If this feels fresh to you, like morning sunshine, that may be because prayer is becoming real. It's alive and ripe with awareness of God's presence. (page 62)

How might you make prayer come more alive for you?

❖ **Teresa's Easy Instructions for Being with the Beloved**

Place yourself in the presence of Christ.

Don't wear yourself out thinking.

Simply speak with your Beloved.

Delight in him.

Lay your needs at his feet.

Acknowledge that he doesn't have to allow you to be in his presence.

(But he does!)

There is a time for thinking,

and a time for being.

Be.

With him. (page 66)

How does your heart respond to these instructions?

- ❖ Here the soul begins to be recollected. It happens supernaturally. The soul cannot make this happen by its own efforts. Grace reveals itself. (page 67)

How might you release your own efforts to make something happen?

- ❖ I was given what people in Teresa's day sometimes called the "gift of tears." Teresa said tears gain all things. One water draws down the other. This gift, a special grace that ancient Christians fairly begged for, poured the master gardener's water all over me. (page 87)

What is your relationship to tears and weeping?

- ❖ For a few moments, set your bucket down. Simply open your heart, and wait for the master gardener. He wants to come and relieve you of so much work. Let him. (page 92)

What burden or task are you being asked to put down?

- ❖ "Chatterchatterchatterchatterchatter!" That was the full frontal assault of my monkey mind. As usual. Before I started what I hoped would become a daily practice. I'd already imagined how my mind would pose a challenge to me hearing God in this way. (page 98)

How do you overthink or self-sabotage your spiritual journey?

- ❖ The important thing is not to think much, but love much, and do whatever stirs you to love. (page 100)

How might you stir love even more?

- ❖ But sustaining a relationship, even with God – staying in love – costs. We pay with our time, commitment, humility, endurance, fidelity, and a host of other things you may not have anticipated in the falling-in-love phase. (page 101)

What cost of your relationship with God do you find most challenging?

- ❖ When the Beloved kisses you it feels like your life, your whole being, is absorbed into that sacred kiss. Any sense of self as separate from this kiss vanishes. It's the difference between being in love and being love. (page 111)

What is your current understanding of being love?

- ❖ If bodies had fuse boxes, his kiss would blow every one of them. (page 111)

What, about God, blows you away?

- ❖ Take a mega supply of humility with you. You're going to need it when you get busy about the pride-busting task of facing yourself. (page 132)

What would you need to really face yourself?

- ❖ Diseases of the soul such as affluenza can sicken us so badly that, if we're not careful, all our wanting stuff will cost us the strength to persevere. (page 133)

Which disease of the soul afflicts you?

- ❖ So, what does it mean to be in the castle? Why did Teresa create this elaborate metaphor for our Christian lives? Here Teresa draws upon her love for chivalrous tales by trading the image of the master gardener for the lofty depiction of a great and powerful king. (page 135)

How does or doesn't Teresa's metaphor of the inner castle work for you?

- ❖ How badly do we want to enter into this chamber where God's deepest secrets are whispered in our ears? (page 137)

What might be holding you back?

- ❖ Are we willing to be mature enough to relinquish our attachments, even the ones that seem oh-so-spiritual, which still hold so much power in our lives? (page 138)

What spiritual maturing do you still need to embrace?

- ❖ Teresa is beginning to share with us how, when we have come deep enough into the castle, by prayer, to be still with our God, we find sweetness and joy. This is a little piece of heaven right where we are. (page 142-143)

What practice would help you to be more still?

- ❖ Twinkling strands of white lights lend a festive air to the already brilliantly lit room. We remain so very ordinary, yet the numinous mingles with the mundane of our lives. God is close enough for us to catch his scent. (page 145)

How might we make the ordinary more festive?

- ❖ This isn't spiritual milk, pilgrims, appropriate for babies. And it's not just any old steak you can pick up at the grocery store. We're about to consume *steak tartare*, it's raw, and a little dangerous. You can only get this at the grown folds' table. (page 150)

Where are you currently sitting for this spiritual banquet?

- ❖ Teresa calls this fifth dwelling a treasure, a precious pearl of contemplation, but cautions, "How few of us prepare our souls so that the Lord can reveal such a treasure to us." (page 153)

What practice helps prepare your soul for the treasure of the Lord?

- ❖ If holy longing begins in the fifth dwelling, it's heightened in the sixth until it's nearly unbearable. That's what Teresa tells us. The soul is wounded with love. (page 156)

How have you been wounded by love?

- ❖ Other great trials will come our way. One of mine was chronic pain. It didn't just afflict my body; it wounded my soul. (page 159)

What is one trial you've had in the past?

- ❖ One night I dreamed I bore two passion wounds of Christ, in my hands. When I awakened, a profound sense of God-infused peace covered me, which felt as luxurious as a velvet cloak. It wasn't just a dream. I'd had a visitation, and somehow I knew God was not finished with my story. (page 159-160)

Have you ever had a dream that felt like a visitation?

- ❖ In the seventh dwelling things are different from before. God removes the scales from the eye of the soul so she can understand in some way the grace she's received. First she is illuminated by a cloud of magnificent splendor. (page 163)

How have scales been removed from your eyes?

- ❖ But God begins to show us how much he loves us by revealing the vast reaches of his love. All he wants is to be joined with us so we can never be torn apart. (page 164)

How has God's love been revealed to you?

- ❖ But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream. They become a single body of water, where river and rainwater are impossible to separate. When a little stream flows into the ocean, who can separate it again? (page 164)

In what ways has your spiritual river flowed into God's?

- ❖ My greatest hope is that Teresa's teachings ignite a burning desire in you to pray. They certainly fanned a flame in me. It is my sincere hope that if you were saint leary before reading this book, you are open now to the spiritual delights and wisdom our heavenly friends have to offer. (page 169)

What is a hope you have for your own spiritual journey?