

Teresa explains the journey of prayer using the image of four ways of drawing water to explain the four degrees of prayer. Before we begin “*His Majesty pulls up the weeds and plants good seed*”. This is very important - God has already done so much in us before we even begin to pray!

The purpose of the garden is to “*provide refreshment for this Lord of ours*”. Again this is fundamental - prayer is for God not for me or my agenda!

Chapters 11, 12 and 13 deal with the first degree of prayer. I am just picking out some key points, letting Teresa speak. Her method is the Gospel and she gives guidance for living it and points out some stumbling blocks.

Method: “They should put themselves in the presence of Christ, and without tiring the intellect, speak with and delight in Him and not wear themselves out in composing syllogisms; rather they should show Him their needs and the reason He doesn’t have to allow us to be in His presence....Let us begin to think about the episode of the Passion, let’s say of when our Lord was bound to the pillar. The intellect goes in search of reasons for better understanding the great sorrows and pain His Majesty suffered in that solitude and many other things that the intellect, if it works hard, can deduce. This is the method of prayer with which all must begin, continue and finish; and it is a very excellent and safe path until the Lord leads one to other supernatural things.” [L 13: 11/12].

#### Essential teaching

1. **Self-Knowledge:** “This path of self-knowledge must never be abandoned, not is there on this journey a soul so much a giant that it has no need to return often to the stage of an infant and a suckling. And this must never be forgotten...There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn’t necessary to return often to the beginning. Along this path of prayer, self-knowledge and the thought of one’s sins is the bread in which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be; they cannot be sustained without this bread.” [L13:15]
2. **Study:** Teresa did not have the possibility of doing formal studies so she depended on the learned men whom she befriended and was guided by. Our circumstances are different but the study of scripture, theology and spirituality are essential for a life of prayer. “I have consulted many learned men because for some years now, on account of a great necessity, I have sought them out more; and I have always been a friend of men of learning. For though some don’t have experience, they don’t despise the Spirit, nor do they ignore it, because in Sacred Scripture, which they study, they always find the truth of the good spirit. I hold that the devil will not deceive with illusions the person of prayer who consults with learned men, unless the person wants to be deceived, because the devils have a tremendous fear of that learning which is accompanied by humility and virtue.” [L 13:18] “For in my opinion a background of studies is like a treasure to aid in this practice if the studies are accompanied by humility”. [L12:4]
3. **Courage and determination:** These are essential in Teresa’s teaching on prayer and she keeps coming back to them. “Indeed a great mercy does He bestow on anyone to whom He gives the grace and courage to resolve to strive for this good with every ounce of energy. For God does not deny Himself to anyone who perseveres”. [L

11:4] “It seems to me more courage is necessary for them than for many other labours of this world” [L 11:11] “His Majesty wants this determination, and He is a friend of courageous souls if they walk in humility and without trusting in self.” [L 13:2]

4. **Humility:** “Since the edifice is built entirely on humility, the closer one comes to God the more progress there must be in this virtue; and if there is no progress in humility, everything is going to be ruined.” [L12:4] “For humility has an excellent feature: when it is present in a work, that work does not leave in the soul a feeling of frustration.” [L 12:5]
5. **Cross:** “Whether in the beginning, the middle or the end, all bear their crosses even though these crosses are different. For all who follow Christ, if they don’t want to get lost, must walk along this path that He trod.” [L 11:5] “The gardener helps Christ carry the cross and reflects that the Lord lived it all during His life...And he is so determined, even though this dryness may last for his whole life, not to let Christ fall with the cross.” [L 11:10] “The soul can place itself in the presence of Christ and grow accustomed to being inflamed with love for His sacred humanity.” [L 12:2]