

Teresa is speaking with people who are struggling. She is very aware of the obstacles, struggles and challenges of the spiritual journey and especially of all that holds a person back and prevents progress. In these three chapters she gives a wealth of advice to such people. These are just some of the obstacles and her advice for dealing with them.

1. **Servants of love:** That is Teresa's definition of people of prayer. The first major obstacle is that we do not know what this means and what a dignity it is. "This doesn't seem to me to mean anything else than to follow resolutely by means of this path of prayer Him who has loved us so much. To be a servant of love is a dignity so great that it delights me in a wonderful way to think about it." [L 11:1]
2. **Lack of detachment:** "We are so miserly and so slow in giving ourselves to God that since His Majesty does not desire that we enjoy something as precious as this without paying a high price, we do not fully prepare ourselves". [L 11: 1]. "We have our attachments since we do not strive to direct our desires to a good effect and raise them up from the earth completely." [L 11:3]
3. **Distractions, dryness, temptations:** "I am of the opinion that to some in the beginning and to others afterwards the Lord desires to give these torments and the many other temptations that occur in order to try His lovers and know whether they will be able to drink the chalice and help Him carry the cross before He lays great treasures within them." [L11:11] Teresa advises over and over again not to be too concerned about these things. "It should be carefully noted - and I say this because I know it through experience - that the soul that begins to walk along this path of mental prayer with determination and that can succeed in paying little attention to whether this delight and tenderness is lacking or whether the Lord gives it (or to whether it has much consolation or no consolation) has travelled great part of the way". [L 11:13] Looking for consolation, signs of progress, etc. are all about focussing on self and show a lack of humility.
4. **False humility:** Humility is a sign of progress, or a fruit of progress; it cannot be acquired by effort alone or be understood in a superficial way. "I have not seen any cowardly soul or any of these who under the pretext of humility remain along the bottom of this path, who do not take many years to advance as far as these courageous ones do in a few." [L 13:2] "I believe the devil harms people who practice prayer and prevents them from advancing by causing them to misunderstand humility". [L 13:4 read rest of paragraph].
5. **Lack of good spiritual direction:** Teresa suffered greatly from this many times in her life and she gives us various instances of it. For example some directors hold people back: "In this matter of desires I have always had great ones...I believe that if I might have had someone to make me fly, I would have turned the desires into deeds more quickly." [L 13:6]

Good judgement, experience and learning are the three essential qualities of a good master [see L 13:16 -19].

6. **Thoughts, fantasies, illusions:** "It is very important in the initial stages of prayer not to be intimidated by thoughts: and believe me in this matter because I know it through experience." [L 13:7] This is a complex issue and one that Teresa struggled

greatly with - it touches the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, and the psychological and the spiritual. Teresa struggles for a language here but yet feels the great need to try to give advice.

7. **They desire everyone else to be very spiritual:** A common temptation in beginners who do not yet have experience and discretion. See paragraph 8 of Chapter 13.
8. **Distress over the sins and failings of others:** Another common temptation, see paragraph 10 of chapter 13. “The safe path for the soul that practices prayer will be not to bother about anything or anyone and to pay attention to itself and to pleasing God.” “Let us strive always to look at the virtues and good deeds we see in others and cover their defects with the thought of our own great sins.” [L 13:10]
9. **Not waiting for God:** A person makes progress in God’s time. “Once again I counsel that it is very important for the spirit not to ascend unless the Lord raises it up” [L12:7]. “What I say about not ascending to God unless He raises one up is language of the spirit. He who has had some experience will understand me.” [L12:5]