

Outline/Important notes from Mansions of the Heart

Spiritual Growth is the deepening experience of God's person and the resulting ability to live in the fullness of what has been given.

For Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, the goal of spiritual formation is clearly relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, to follow their lead and scripture, our goal in spiritual formation must be God Himself.

Some notes on the outline: I have inserted a page break between each mansion. Since 'The Dark Nights' section is so long, I have put it at the very end. This is not a true outline, per se. I have listed the main ideas from the six 'rooms' of each mansion. Of course, these are the sentences and notes that stood out to me, and some paragraphs have no representative sentence or line listed here. I have almost wholly left out the readings about the male and female examples.

First Mansion: New Beginnings

Colette's Key Concept: God Exists, He loves me.

Your Heart's Desire

Our attention is still focused primarily on the things of the world as they center on us. God may merely be a means to a lifelong desire for security and happiness.

Key Activities

We begin the task of ridding sins from daily activities. In today's world, there may not be a strong motivation to do this.

Good works become more intentional as loving others becomes more important.

Our lifestyle is still largely reflective of the world's agendas.

Changing Patterns in Prayer

Our prayers mostly involve requests for help with issues of life.

Discursive in nature: talking to God. Possibly written or liturgical.

We've begun intercessory prayers for others.

Jesus' Initiatives

God is present, the Holy Spirit speaks: we have not developed the ability to discern spiritually and can scarcely see His light.

He gives 'graces/revelations of himself' throughout our lives, not based on our merit, but to spur us on to further growth.

Schemes of the Enemy

The enemy gives us increased attention, but maybe not right away.

- *Delusions about how important it is to be accepted by non-Christian friends*
- *How narrow and rigid our upbringing was*
- *How much pleasure can be found in the 'fun'/sin.*
- *He attempts to reinforce our perceived importance (or perceived deep unimportance)*
- *False pride, shame are tactics*

Keys for Growth

Bible study is critical—

Bible books that may be helpful: John, Genesis, Proverbs.

We must know who God is before real intimacy can develop. Getting a right understanding of who God is, who I am in relationship to God, who is Jesus, etc. is key. And this knowledge must move to an intimate and personal experience of the person of the One we call God.

Interaction with an authentic Christian community is essential for maturity to develop freely.

- *Nurturing small groups, essential relationships.*
- *Humility increases*

Increasing self-knowledge is important

MBTI, Strength finders, DISC, having a spiritual guide,

Beginning the practice of noticing answers to prayer and saying thanks would be helpful.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS: “Where do you think God is asking you to start?”

Extra-Biblical helps: Alpha course; ‘Survival Kit’ book; Listening to Dan Mohler on YouTube, *Chronicles of Narnia*

Second Mansion: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Colette's Key Concept: Since God Exists, and He loves me, then I need to be more like Him (My old life doesn't fit with God's idea of me and I want His idea.)

Your Heart's Desire

We feel like a schizophrenic here. It does not feel like Spiritual Growth.

- *Our faith is deepening*
- *We still find ourselves engaged in worldly pastimes (for pleasure, security, significance)*

The Holy Spirit is enlightening us about the mixed motives present within us. We're becoming more aware of Kingdom vs. World choices.

We have begun to hear or perceive God to some extent and have been drawn closer to the Light.

Key Activities

We attempt to live the Christian life more intentionally.

The struggles we are experiencing are increasing our desire to listen to God.

- *We feel greater attraction to/need for people to discuss our walk with*
- *We long to hear from God in sermons, Bible study, and Christian books.*
- *We're working out what it means to love neighbor.*
- *We slowly experience transformation as we discover spiritual and emotional wounding in the past*

Changing Patterns in Prayer

Prayers are still mainly discursive (here's the problem, here's how to fix it), our growing concern for others increases intercession.

We have a more developed sense of the Holy Spirit's promptings, sensing God communicating with us during prayer and through outward circumstances.

Depending upon teaching of spiritual warfare, there may be confusion about answers to prayer and circumstance. It's important to remember James 1:17 in this light.

Prayer in the second mansion may not bring the same peace it once did in the first mansion.

Beginning an understanding of conversation in prayer, not just telling. May begin changing internal self-talk to talking to God.

Jesus' Initiatives

God is calling us ceaselessly through life circumstance, inspiring our reading of his word and conversations with other Christians.

God uses the enemy's attack to identify areas of needed growth and healing.

We (often) have not learned discernment well enough to recognize God's light in these attacks.

Schemes of the Enemy

Because we are progressing, we are a greater threat to the kingdom of darkness.

(Remembering to hold up the shield of faith and wield the sword of the word will help)

The enemy intensifies attacks, trying to deceive us about where to find real happiness, security, significance.

- *Tries to convince that true discipleship will cost every pleasure*
- *Exaggerates perceptions of pleasure in recreation, entertainment, and appetites*
- *Highlights issues of material security and success (contrasting with serving Jesus)*
- *Temptation to sin increases*

We tend to blame God or ourselves for this turmoil, rather than the devil's harassment.

- *We fail to recognize what's happening and don't call upon the Holy Spirit.*
- *Shame, discouragement, even hopelessness can become dominant themes*

Attacks increase during prayer, designed to make us feel unworthy.

- *Memories of past sins*
- *Shameful thoughts*
- *Message of condemnation*
- *Floods of distractions of things to do.*

Keys for Growth

The greatest keys here: Perseverance and Prayer

We need teaching on spiritual warfare.

Continued study of scripture, emphasizing the authority of scripture

Bible books to study may be: Proverbs; James; Mark

Trusted Christian relationships are crucial:

- *emphasizing reassurance that the 'increased level of struggle' is not failure,*
- *encouragement to continue to follow to the best of our ability*
- *continued teaching about the love and grace of God (temptation is not sin)*

Considerable effort is required on our part to persevere in faithfulness and obedience, even though it is always God's grace that makes our effort effective. "The greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in conformity."

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

Remember the time when that wouldn't even have bothered you? Don't you see how you have grown?

What hurts the most about this?

Don't you know that you wouldn't have been so concerned a few years ago and that most people still aren't?

What step is God asking you to take now?

Where are you experiencing conflicts between God's way and the world's way in your life?

Extra-Biblical helps: *Battlefield of the Mind, Screwtape Letters, When Pigs Move In, Spirit Controlled Temperament, Purpose Driven Life.*

Third Mansion: Following Jesus

Colette's Key Concept: I am His, I want to join Him in his Work, there's stuff I can do!

Your Heart's Desire

We become fully convinced that life with Jesus is the only way to live.

A scriptural worldview and moral values have replaced the worldly we had; we try to avoid committing even minor sins

A relatively stable faith, the inner assurance of our salvation and personal knowledge of God's goodness.

Key Activities

Our faith has become the center of life and activity

- *Active in local congregation*
- *Regular Bible study and participate in Christian Ed*
- *Good stewardship of time and money (possible tithing)*
- *Intentional acts of love and caring*
- *Begun to discover spiritual gifts and manifest fruit of Holy Spirit*

Serving God in Ministry flourishes

- *We recognize our calling to follow Christ in His concern for the lost, poor, and marginalized.*
- *We find joy in knowing we are serving Jesus and our work has eternal significance.*
- *Our work FOR god can too easily be equated with our relationship WITH God*

Changing Patterns in Prayer

May continue working on changing self-talk to ongoing conversation with God.

A possible growing sense that my thoughts may not be God's thoughts

The very beginnings of discerning Spirit vs. Self.

Life of prayer has deepened, although still mainly discursively talking to God.

Times of reflective reading and meditation on Scripture have deepened our quality of prayer, and the level of communication and communion with God.

Formats of prayer might follow ACTS acronym (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication).

Not yet have found any real spiritual joys that come purely from intimacy with God.

Pride and presumption can become a real problem, since we seem to have "mastered" the disciplined life.

- *If God doesn't do what we expect, we may think ourselves faithful and God unfaithful.*
- *If we are 'tried by God' in some minor matter, we may go about "disturbed and afflicted."*
- *If experiencing dryness or discouragement in prayer, 'work harder' or 'do another job in the church' is not the answer. We may tend to think "If I'm really busy, I must be important."*

Jesus' Initiatives

In times of intense prayer, God gives us a few glimpses of Himself and His love, beyond the issue being prayed about

In stress or recollection, the Lord may give a sense of peace that speaks more of His presence than to a solution

He continuously calls us

- *to choose between the opportunities presented by the world and discipleship to Christ.*
- *performing healing surgeries on our hearts, when we realize how we've been distracted from Him*
- *creating within us a 'holy dissatisfaction', a longing for more, urging questions of "Is this all there is? Is working hard for God all there is to life with God? There must be something more."*
- *We may not recognize this deep longing, but only feel frustration and dissatisfaction (it's symptoms). Though this feels negative, "isn't that wonderful!?!" that God is drawing you further in.*

Schemes of the Enemy

The line of attack becomes subtler: Pride and Distraction primary tactics

- *Keep us out of conscious contact with God, too busy working for God and balancing the demands of daily life*
- *Temptation to 'plug in' to a church program rather than following the direct leading of God.*
- *Pride and distractions are designed to keep us from discerning God's call to seek His face and abide in Him*
 - *We feel 'important, mature and better than most.'*
 - *Too many good things make us so busy we get tired and frustrated, over commitment leads to confusion and frustration with God not blessing what I'm doing for Him.*
 - *Prayer becomes filled with everything we're not getting done well enough and/or pleading for more and more energy and time.*

Keys for Growth

A spiritual formation roadmap is useful for showing:

- *there is still a wonderful adventure with Jesus ahead*
- *there is less work instead of more when we accept Jesus' invitation to draw closer to Him*

Mentors and Teachers are needed:

- *To show we must stop relying on our own effort in prayer and ministry and become more responsive to God.*
- *To consult so as to not do our own will in anything.*
- *To show how to be still in prayer and listen to the heart of God, to seek Him, for His own sake and ours.*

- *To help us focus more toward relationship with God rather than simply work for Him.*
- *To encourage to take time to listen to Him in both scripture and prayer*
- *To encourage submission to/provide accountability within the Body of Christ*
- *To reassure that God is more interested in us than in all we do for Him.*

Retreats

Ongoing study and meditative reading of Scriptures

Bible Books suggestions: 1 Corinthians, Judges, Romans, Esther

A Need to learn detachment from anything that protects them from the needs of the world and from the awesome mystery of God. "Order may be evidence of an attempt to use reason to control one's environment rather than trusting oneself to God."

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

What 'holy dissatisfactions' are you dealing with right now? How might they be pointing to spiritual growth God wants for you?

What 'key for growth' appears to be a good next step to help you cooperate with God's work of spiritual formation within you?

Extra-Biblical Helps: *Experiencing God, Spirit Controlled Temperament, My Utmost for His Highest, Brother Andrew, The Hiding Place, The Heavenly Man*

Fourth Mansion: Discovering the Love of Jesus

Colette's Key Concept: I am His, and He is mine.

Your Heart's Desire

We develop a divinely bestowed passion for knowing, loving and seeking God
Motivations are from love rather than obligation, personal gain, blessing others, or even doing the right and Godly thing.
Our will is occupied with God himself.

Key Activities

There begins to be and is an integration and balance of our active ministry and our inner life of prayer and reflection. Actively, and selectively, serve in well-suited ministry to which Christ has called us.

Ministry focus shifts from what we can do for God to: Our new experience of God's love compels us to respond to that love through loving our neighbor in increasing measure, resulting in greater commitment to service, greater compassion for others, and greater willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Jesus' love for others.

We depend less on what we once thought we needed for safety and security, and more on God's love and the gifts of the Holy Spirit working within us.

We find ourselves withdrawing from worldly delights, in favor of spiritual delights from God.

Changing Patterns in Prayer

We yearn for greater intimacy with God and therefore seek His presence more in prayer. We begin 'infused prayer,' a responsive prayer where God sets the agenda. Or Christian contemplation, in which we move beyond the point of meditation and just behold God.

We become more interested in God's words in prayer, than in our words.

Intercession continues, but it is now more responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Our desire for extended time of prayer motivates us to plan, structure, and prioritize life more discerningly to get it.

Changing from inner conversation with God to more listening 'What do you want from me here Lord?' and then doing it.

Better able to discern self vs Spirit in thoughts.

Jesus' Initiatives

God provides a gentle awareness of His loving presence, both in formal prayer and in the prayer of daily life. We experience 'lights' or insights and realizations. As we gain the ability to remain attentive to God during our prayer time, He is able to say more to us.

As we experience God's love more profoundly, we gain insight into how spiritually and emotionally wounded we are and why we have such difficulty loving and being loved freely.

He continues to recreate the heart so that we can have the freedom to receive His love fully and return it unconditionally.

As our hearts are molded and healed, we learn to trust His love and forgiveness to open ourselves freely to Him, and to discern His presence—and gain the ability to see and hear at a heart level.

Schemes of the Enemy

Distraction is the major scheme here during prayer and contemplation as well as in daily life. Real intimacy with God is dangerous to our enemy so he wants to keep us busy, and stuck, in the third mansion.

Shame is another line of attack, recalling to mind every sin and slight sinful tendency. However, God can use these attacks to teach us. “Why do you think the devil is attacking you along that line?” What is the inner need whose satisfaction the enemy is trying to falsify?

Keys for Growth

Spiritual Growth in the 4th mansion comes primarily through times of solitude and silence, prayer and contemplation.

Journaling helps us reflect on our transitions in prayer as we record pleasant AND difficult experiences.

Mentors help us interpret God’s movements of love.

Reading and teaching about contemplative prayer and spiritual warfare in prayer are essential. Ongoing reflective study of Scripture.

Bible Book Suggestions: Philippians, Song of Solomon, Psalms

Remembering that it’s not spiritual experiences that are indicators of growth, but love in action.

Remembering that it’s not the practice/discipline that brings transformation, it’s the Holy Spirit at work within us. The disciplines just give Him opportunity.

Accountability providing ongoing support and protection from self-delusion and error.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

“Why do you think the devil is attacking you along that line?”

What is the inner need whose satisfaction the enemy is trying to falsify?

What do you find frightening about intimacy with God?

How can you cooperate with what God is doing in you?

What tends to keep you from responding to God as you really want to?

Extra Biblical helps: Precept Bible Studies, *Practicing the Presence of God*, Training from Christian Healing Ministries in Florida or EMI in Cincinnati, Ohio, *Embrace the Spirit, Do What Jesus Did*.

Fifth Mansion: Longing for Oneness with God—

Colette's Key Concept: Honing the will?

Your Heart's Desire

A real sense of wanting to be in heaven, but NOT out of a desire for escape.

There is a call to union with God, but union itself doesn't take place until the 7th mansion. Instead of the urge to exert our own power to learn, understand and serve, we find ourselves weak, hungry, thirsty, yearning, in love and desiring only to respond to the Love that has possessed us.

Not everything in this phase is bliss. There may be a "dark night."

The fifth mansion can be a time filled with frustrations actually caused by our spiritual growth.

Our deep desire to serve Christ and a hunger for greater intimacy with God continue to intensify and have become the sole motive for our service.

Key Activities

Our desire to do totally and only the will of God is the key to the experience of growing union with God.

Work has become prayer and prayer has become work, all loving God.

We transition toward what Jesus is doing (rather than what he might like).

Our intuition has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit's indwelling; our will is being conformed to God's.

Although the prayer experiences of the fifth mansion make death to all but God's will easier, nevertheless considerable effort is still required in crucifying the flesh.

Roles and giftedness no longer determine ministry direction, but personal leading of the Lord.

We begin to become more our true self and that allows us expression of the love of Jesus to others.

We find ourselves more committed to sacrificial living and investment in the kingdom of God.

Changing Patterns in Prayer

Contemplation becomes the focus of prayer: times of absorption and silence where distractions cease, and we are able to rest in God's presence.

Prayer has become the activity of love where the Lover sets the agenda and the Beloved responds.

Intercession shifts from a long list of prayer to holding the persons before the Lord, trusting Him to know our heart's desire and His best for the person.

We have learned that we don't have to try to control God with our words.

In some situations, we know He will be giving direction so we are ready to listen and don't even have to ask.

Jesus' Initiatives

God continues to kindle the flames of love in us, but He doesn't fully show us the depth of the growing intensity of our relationship with Him.

Sometimes He hides himself from clear view, causing us to have to trust in Him more deeply. We want more than anything to demonstrate our love for God and please him. But we also become aware of how impossible it seems to do it, by action or thought. We're increasingly aware of our own sinfulness.—Not maybe in action as we have dealt with that mostly in other mansions, but here it is dealing with thought and attitude. Old wounds may resurface with disturbing ferocity, as God is at work bringing new levels of healing that weren't possible at earlier stages of self-awareness and faith.

Schemes of the Enemy

God allows increased attacks against us as diagnostics of needed healing and growth. Self-love is a real danger here.

Discouragement is a great strategy here, maybe trying to convince us that 'dark night' experiences are actually regression.

Distraction during prayer to keep us from times of true stillness with God.

Keys for Growth

Continued cooperation with God in service to others and extended times of silent communion with God are the most important practices for growth.

Times with God in prayer of silence, where Spirit communicates with spirit, are just as important.

We desperately need intentional, consistent, and extended times of solitude and silence, where God can both minister and heal our heart, times when we can become aware of the infinite Love surrounding us.

Mentors and Spiritual directors: lend a listening ear, encourage, and help with interpretation of our experiences.

Journaling is important.

It's great to have someone who is able to minister healing during this time.

Ongoing reading of the Scriptures and the Christians Mystics will offer sources of inspiration, teaching, and encouragement.

Bible Book Suggestions: Revelation, Ecclesiastes

You may find yourself growing more into areas of: humility, detachment, solitude, suffering, obedience and generosity.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

What seems to motivate your service to others?

When you pray do you spend more time listening or talking?

What do you long for in your relationship with God?

What strategy does the enemy seem to be using to cause you discouragement?

Extra-Biblical Helps: *Chronicles of Narnia, Celebration of Discipline*

Sixth Mansion: The Passion of God's Love

Colette's Key Concept: Maturity?

Your Heart's Desire

Our will is continuously absorbed in God, but our imagination and memory are not. These wandering thoughts can give us real consternation

We have become so completely dependent on God that we are no longer attached to created things....we value them only when they are part of our love and obedience to God.

God alone gives us our identity, significance, security, and approval; we no longer need people or things in the same way we once did.

Key Activities

We have come to realize that every aspect of life contains the presence and will of God, and therefore the opportunity to experience Him.

'Personal significance' dims in the light of His 'ultimate significance' and His grand design for all creation.—We may have less or no ambition of our own.

Now we see God's will more clearly and respond more naturally.

Not everyone understands what happens to us, we may get criticism and there may be gossip.

As we grow, blame does not intimidate the soul but strengthens it...it acquires a special and very tender love for its persecutors.

Changing Patterns in Prayer

Prayer definitely has become an experiential time.

It's less a conversation and more an ongoing 'hum' of companionship and presence.

This 'silent abiding', contemplation of God Alone, has become the very nature of our prayer life. We may experience:

- *Ecstasy: an experience of intense joy*
- *Rapture: being so absorbed in the wonder of God that we are unaware of our surroundings.*
- *Locutions: hearing audible words from God.*
- *Transport: sense of being somewhere else and experiencing that reality.*
- *Flight of the Spirit: experiences of heavenly places*

Tests regarding what happens to us during these times: concerning words from God, the first and truest is the power and authority they bear, for locutions from God effect what they say...The second sign is the great quiet left in the soul, the devout and peaceful recollection, the readiness to engage in the praises of God...The third sign is that these words remain in the memory for a very long time, and some are never forgotten, as are those we listen to here on earth—those we hear from men.

Jesus' Initiatives

“Wounds of Love” As we are enveloped in the radiant light of God’s love, there is unimaginable joy, wonder, fulfillment, and life. However, when these subside, there is emptiness and awareness of the darkness of this life, and how truly dark is the mirror in which we see God.

We realize that beyond the particular “sins” of commission or omission there resides within us this sinful tendency toward selfishness that taints all our thoughts and actions. It is very important for what lies ahead that we know our own misery and that He is King.

Schemes of the Enemy

The enemy attempts to accuse us into thinking that it is through some error that this awareness of sin or absence of God is happening

The enemy might try to induce us to think that God is unjust and unloving to allow such experience.

The devil will also attempt to counterfeit experiences with God and lead us astray.

Keys for Growth

Main key is responding to God’s initiative, as this is a time when our transformation happens almost entirely through the initiative and grace of God. .—This is a real letting-go-and-letting-God.

Life needs to become less cluttered, more balanced. Times for extended prayer and reflection are essential for this discerning process, because the intellect and memories have not become completely absorbed in God.

Mentors are even more helpful.

Journaling continues to be helpful.

Spiritual reading of the scriptures.

Continued reading of the Christian mystics.

Supportive community...helping us navigate these unfamiliar waters and keeping us centered and grounded in the body of Christ. Close spiritual friendships can be a wonderful blessing.

Spiritual experiences in prayer and daily life launch us into a deeper reality of being ‘in’ the world, but not ‘of’ it.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

How is silence invading your prayer time? Are you cooperating with it or fighting it?

What do you long for in your relationship with God?

What helps you persevere when you become very conscious of your sinfulness or feel that God is hiding Himself from you?

How is God calling you to experience Him in the ‘least of these?’

Seventh Mansion: A Life of Love in the Trinity

Colette's Key Concept: Oneness

In this season, we come to experience a complete integration of mind, body, and spirit in the life of Christ. Some of us have visited the seventh mansion and tasted this unity, but not many fully live here. It's hard for most of us to even imagine a life in which we live fully in Christ and Christ lives fully in us, where our character, our very being, is perfected in His image.

This mansion, though still containing times of significant mystical experience, has fewer highs and lows than we experienced in the fourth, fifth, and particularly the sixth. We live continuously and transcendentally in the present moment, in the fullness of Christ's love. We experience 'relative perfection' in the Christian life.

Your Heart's Desire

The longings and fears that have been so much a part of our spiritual experience have passed—no longer afraid of displeasing Him.

The struggle between worship and work, contemplation and serving, has gone.

Key Activities

Teresa says that the Mary and Martha parts of us are now joined together.

This new union with God does not protect us from the pain of this world but launches us into it.

Teresa says: "Here in our religious life the Lord asks of us only two things: love of His Majesty and love of neighbor...The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbor."

Brother Boniface says: "You have to rest in the 'unfelt peace and unfelt joy' within you."

These 'fruits of the Holy spirit' are really spiritual in nature, not primarily emotional. Both Teresa and John speak of 'relative perfection' or relative holiness', as true perfection is obtained in our heavenly bodies, not here on earth. Teresa describes perfection not in terms of personal qualities but in terms of our obedience in love to Jesus. Possibly marked by a degree of 'unintentional self-forgetfulness.'

So deeply impacted by our experience of union with the Trinity, we trust at a new level. We know in complete confidence, that if we take care to follow Jesus faithfully He will take care of our circumstances in the ways that are best for us; we simply needn't be concerned about it. Jesus is enough. Teresa is quick to point out that this doesn't mean forgetfulness of such things as food, sleep, or exercise. We want to remain as fit as possible to serve our Lord with the best we can give. But we are willing to live in whatever circumstance He has placed us for the service of our Lord.

Another developing attribute is 'the desire to suffer.'

Maybe a complete loss of personal ambition.

Changing Patterns in Prayer

Prayer has primarily become trusting silence.

There are almost never any experiences of dryness or interior disturbance of the kind that were present at times in all the other dwelling places, but the soul is almost always in quiet.

Earlier in our spiritual journey, we may have experienced touches of union in times of contemplative prayer; now it has become a condition of life, pervading formal prayer and daily life. Contrary to what we might expect, because of the inner experience of God's presence, the raptures that were once so wonderful and encouraging are now taken away. The disappearance of these spiritual blessings would have been troubling before, but they have now become unnecessary.

Yet the level of awareness of God's presence in us still varies. There is no 'dryness' in the way we experienced it in the previous mansions, but we don't experience constant awareness of our Lord in His inner dwelling place within us. Teresa says there are times when God leaves us in our natural state, and this results in a tumult of spiritual warfare, lasts for a few days, and it is important that we receive support from our spiritual community. (Possible training?—Colette's note)

Jesus' Initiatives

We described our increasing growth in the last four mansions as an increase in God's initiative and corresponding decrease in our 'work' at spiritual growth. Virtually all of life has become a response to Jesus' initiatives.

In the earlier mansions, Jesus was always initiating, but we were blind and deaf to most of it and went our own way the best we could.

Now, His divine initiatives are received in our hearts and minds and we literally 'do what we see the Father doing.'

Schemes of the Enemy

Though the devil tempts, bites and doesn't abandon his schemes against us, the ongoing temptations accusations, and lies are automatically repulsed and resisted resulting in a life that is more conformed to the life of Jesus, with increasing manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit. Our human nature is still tainted by sin, and so we must be constantly vigilant to avoid deception or pride that would cause a fall.

- *We must not be so struck with the love of God that we dismiss His justice*
- *Nor so enthralled with the transcendent mystery of God that we ignore the imminent presence of God in a sister or brother*
- *CS Lewis: 'There is but one good; that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demonic it will be if it rebels. It's not out of bad mice or bad fleas you made demons, but out of bad archangels.'*
- Keys for Growth

The most significant condition for our growth in union with God is the prayer of attentive trusting silence. It is focused time in His presence that sustains us and enables us to follow Him faithfully.

We must all the more guard our times for total attentiveness while we have become even more focused on living out our love for Jesus through service.

Things that aid 'attentive trusting silence:'

- *Extended solitude*
- *Ongoing daily obedience*
- *Loving God and loving neighbor have joined (our focus: loving Jesus in others)*
- *Diligence in spiritual disciplines (Teresa: I repeat, it is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs.)*
- *Spiritual community (Though there are few spiritual directors who have gone before us into the seventh, God can use almost anyone to minister to us, if we are attentive.)*
- *Share our weaknesses and needs with others*
- *Immersion in Scripture*

HELPFUL QUESTIONS:

What is your goal in your relationship with God?

What attachments do you think God still needs to weed out of your life that may be blocking full union with Him?

Which Keys to Growth seem most important for you at this point in your journey with Jesus?

The Dark Nights of the Soul

The lives of committed and mature women and men described in the Bible and in history—people “after God’s own heart”—often experience extended times where God seemed absent and life seemed dark.

The Dark Nights wrongly interpreted, have derailed many a maturing follower of Jesus. It’s therefore important for us to understand them for our own sake and to be able to encourage our fellow travelers.

The Dark Nights can be experienced as early as the fifth mansion; but are more typical of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh.

We must also learn to live with Him in the single-mindedness of faith, rather than the pleasures even of the spiritual experience.

Can be compared to boot camp.

Purpose: To know and serve Jesus the fully committed way (given their lives to love God with their whole heart, mind, and strength, and then love their neighbor as themselves) we must face and overcome the enemies of sin and evil; and learn how to follow our King exactly.

Purpose: We who would pursue the union of love with God must be stripped of the weaknesses that cannot tolerate God’s holiness and be given a transformed heart that will love and trust God fully. That’s why the Holy Spirit leads us into the boot camp of these dark nights.

Examples of things God is working on in this season: Spiritual Pride, Our need for compliments, Secret sins, Attachments, etc.

We underestimate the depth of our dependence on this world, our distrust of God’s goodness, and the brokenness of our human nature.

If we are ever to fully experience oneness with God, He has to reveal our other gods to us so that we can let them go.

There are two Dark Night experiences with a break in between. One is Dark Night of the Senses, the other is the Dark Night of the Spirit. St. John of the Cross says the DN of the Senses is light compared to the DN of the Spirit. Between we usually enjoy a long period of consolation in which we are able to commune with God in contemplation---where we are freer to abandon ourselves to Him and rejoice in deepening intimacy with Him.

Purpose: After DN of Senses, our “spiritual senses” have been strengthened and purified; the spirit must also be released from all its propensities to trust in anything but God alone.

RESULT: John says, “...through the annihilation and calming of my faculties, passions, appetites, and affections (by which my experience and satisfaction in God was base) I went out from my human operation and way of acting to God’s operation way of acting.”

RESULT: John says we are now able to relate to God more from our newly created divine nature than from our “old self,” the way we had before. We no longer need meditation as a doorway to contemplation and silence; we can go more directly to a relationship of spiritual delight.

Dark Night of the Senses

Our old ways of perceiving God change: what we receive through our senses of thought, emotion, touch, sight and sound, simply stop. Our meditation on Scripture becomes dull, insights disappear. Prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling.

Our hunger and thirst for God only increases.

Dark night of the senses is a particular experience with identifiable symptoms:

- *Comes after a season of consistent and satisfying meditative prayer, and we have been experiencing some detachment from old dependencies on worldly things.*
- *In the darkness we no longer derive real satisfaction or consolation from spiritual practices or from other people.*
- *The darkness does not have any apparent causes; it is not the result of depression or newly committed sins or imperfections.*
- *We feel as though we are not serving God well, but backsliding in our faith, and we become concerned about failing God.*
- *We experience a powerlessness to meditate on God's word and to make use of our imagination to relate to the truths of Scripture. God doesn't seem to speak to us through our analysis and synthesis of the ideas in the text. Prayer may feel like a waste of time.*
- *In the midst of our spiritual dryness and the absence of God's consolations, a "dark light" that brings us even greater pain. As this dark light shines on us, we gain a greater awareness of our own sinful nature and the extent to which every thought and action is tainted with self.*
- *We find ourselves deeply grieved over our sinful nature and the sins of others.*
- *In the light of our greater self-knowledge, we find ourselves humbler and more patient with the struggles of others.*
- *The Dark Night season often feels even emptier by the absence of qualified spiritual direction to help interpret what is happening, or worse, by bad advice from others.*
- *Whether the Dark Night time is relatively short or extends for years, it is terribly painful, like that endured by a lover separated from her beloved.*

Steps author felt he went through:

- *First attributed the change in prayer life to busy schedule and fatigue. Prayer experiences seemed empty.*
- *Became more and more aware of own thoughts and actions: horrified to see that everything done or thought was in some way associated with sinful nature.*
- *Trying to resist, repent, or put on the full armor of God did not change the experience.*
- *These feelings and experience did not let up for many more months.*
- *Finally instead of fussing and complaining about God's experiential absence in my life, I became grateful that He was just there—unseen, unfelt, but there.*

St. John of the Cross says:

- *He begins to shift how He feeds our Hearts. Even though He once nourished us (by His Word, love and presence) through our human senses. He begins now to give us that same food, instead through our spirit.*

- *By withdrawing the soul from the life of the senses and placing it in that of the spirit—that is, He brings it from meditation to contemplation—where the soul no longer has the power to work or meditate with its faculties on the things of God.*
- *One of the greatest benefits of this Dark Night of the Senses is “the knowledge of self and one’s own misery.”*
- *Pride falls away, “aware of his own dryness and wretchedness, the thought of his being more advanced than others does not even occur in its first movements, as it did before; on the contrary, he realizes that others are better.”*
- *John encourages us not to try to regain our experience of God by harder effort at what used to work. We are to wait on the Lord in faith, trusting His goodness and tenderness.*

As we persevere in faith, we learn not to rely on our “sensual” experience of God, but to look for Him in new and hidden ways—in our hearts.

Everything may seem to say otherwise, but you realize you can answer the question “Do you believe that Jesus is here and that He loves you?” in only one way: “I believe; help my unbelief.” Though we may long for the emotional experience of His love, we must finally say, “You, Lord, are enough.”

Maybe worst of all is the pain caused because we have been so touched by the love of God and so enflamed with love for Him that it is almost intolerable to live in this body of sin and in this world of corruption.

What To do: Persevere in faith and “be still and know that I am God.” Oswald Chambers says, “Remain quiet. If you open your mouth in the dark you will talk in the wrong mood: darkness is the time to listen.

Dark Night of the Spirit

This night is like a vision quest.

Aimed at the very roots of our sin.

Awareness of God is taken away.

All we feel is dislocation and discomfort. Like Divine rejection. Possibly no delight in God.

Teresa says, “The Lord, it seems gives the devil license so that the soul might be tried and even be made to think it is rejected by God. Many are the things that war against it with an interior oppression so keen and unbearable that I don’t know what to compare this experience to if not to the oppression of those that suffer hell, for no consolation is allowed in the midst of this tempest.”

John of the Cross says, “In this night both the sensory and the spiritual parts are despoiled of all its apprehensions and delights and the soul is made to walk in dark and pure faith, which is proper and adequate means to divine union...He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings.”

But the very fire that purges us also gives new life in our deepest soul. John: "The very fire of love which afterwards is united with the soul, glorifying it, is that which previously assails it by purging it." We can wander in frustration and anguish if we don't know what is happening to us. There remains only two alternatives: give up or persevere. John believes that if the Dark Night is to truly have its effect, it must last for some years, no matter how intense it may be.

Our quest changes from our own spiritual growth to oneness with God Himself. He alone is our destiny, our goal.

John of the Cross insists that these Dark Nights are not optional; nor may they be avoided if we are to grow in relationship to God, beyond a certain point. Everyone [can] then take comfort in the thought that no matter how severe the purifications, it is still the work of God's gentle hand, clearing away the debris of inordinate affection and making room for the divine light.

When God sees that we have the desire and potential to join Him in Trinitarian love, He designs for us both the boot camp and then the vision quest that will transform us into warriors of love.

Questions/Statements that may be helpful for the Dark Nights:

Remember that the Dark Nights come in the midst of significant maturity. We have experienced times of desolation all along, but this heart surgery is a distinct work of God.

Isn't that wonderful! Don't you see how God has blessed you by letting you see the truth?"
"It's God's love illuminating your heart. He loves the real you, not the person you wish you were. If you look for His love there, you will miss it. We can't really know God's love for us until we know the one He loves."

"The Dark Night is a good thing, you know."

Do you want union with God enough to wish for the Dark Nights?

How might you let God strengthen you today so that you can persevere if, someday, He hides Himself from you?

How do you feel about the possibility that Dark Nights may be lying in wait, to bless you in the years to come?