

JAMES AND AVILA

A Catholic Women's Study

BY STERLING JAQUITH

Author Note

Welcome! This study has been on my heart for a few years. I wanted to create a free resource for Catholic women to give them a reason to gather. I wanted these women to speak the words of the Bible out loud and add in wisdom from a saint. I wanted to start with James and Avila because they are both a fabulous mix of tough love and hope.

The first four lessons in this study are about detaching ourselves from the world and putting our trust in God. The second four lessons are about challenging ourselves to stare our sin in the face and to work hard to overcome it with the power of prayer.

If some of the questions seem repetitive, you're right, that was on purpose. We need to hear hard truths over and over again until it sinks into our hearts and our subconscious minds. We need these truths to be imprinted so we carry them with us into the battles we face every day. And be certain, you are in a great battle.

My hope is that I can get Catholics reading their Bibles more often and examining their conscience more deeply. I think this is better to do in community so I encourage you to be brave, grab a few women around you, and dive into this study.

I will be praying for all the women reading this study. May God bring you peace as you journey to discern His will for your life.

Blessings,

Sterling Jaquith



How This Study Works

COMMUNITY

You may do this study alone, with one friend, or with many. You may do it as an in-person group or you may do it together online in a Facebook group!

PACING

This study has eight reflections. You can either do them two at a time for a four-week study or one at a time for an eight-week study.

READING

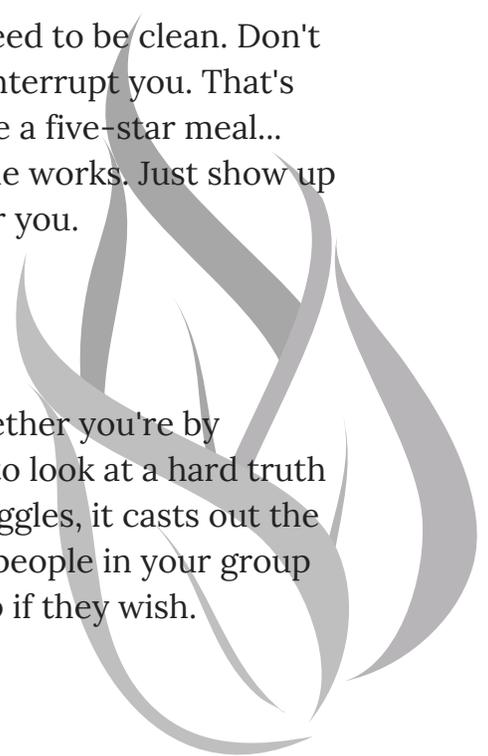
This study requires no homework or reading before meetings. Simply show up, read the reflections out loud, and let the discussion flow. If you would like additional reading to do at home, spend time reading and re-reading the Book of James and *Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Keep it simple. Your house can be tidy but it does not need to be clean. Don't be a Martha ;) Kids may be in the background and may interrupt you. That's okay. Kids interrupted Jesus too. You don't need to serve a five-star meal... some coffee and muffins work just fine. Even coffee alone works. Just show up ready to encounter the Lord and the message He has for you.

BE BRAVE

Each lesson has an opportunity for you to be brave. Whether you're by yourself or with a group of women, I will challenge you to look at a hard truth and speak it out loud. When we shine a light on our struggles, it casts out the darkness and lets Jesus in. **This is optional.** Don't force people in your group to share, just leave some time when people may open up if they wish.



Lesson One

“Our body has this defect that, the more it is provided care and comforts, the more needs and desires it finds.”

Teresa of Avila

REFLECTION

We live in an extremely comfortable country. Whether we're suffering financially, physically, or experience great emotional pain, we have more comforts and luxuries than any other time in the world. Americans have more wealth and resources than most every other country. It's easy not only to take this for granted, but to yearn for more.

We want a bigger house.

We want nicer clothes.

We want a better job so we can save more money.

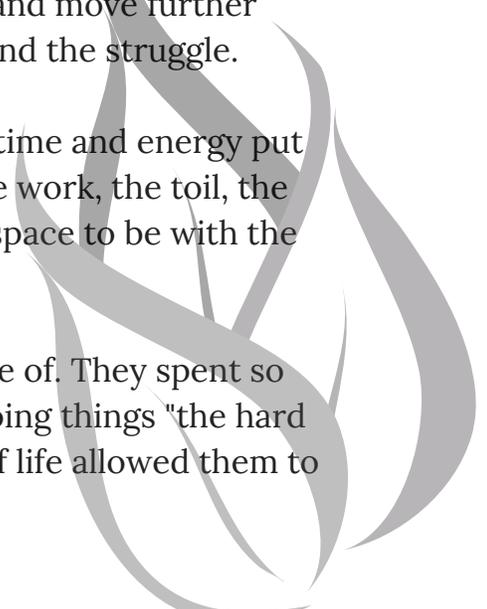
We want to budget for organic food.

We wish we could give our kids piano lessons or help with college.

None of these things are intrinsically bad but the constant reaching and wanting can get in the way of appreciating what we have. It can also get in the way of working hard, which is often a gift given to us from the Lord. If we suddenly had more money, would we stop working hard and move further from the Lord? Sometimes the real treasure is the work and the struggle.

For those of you who garden, you know full well that the time and energy put into gardening rarely saves you that much money. But the work, the toil, the love you put into it... that is the real harvest. It gives you space to be with the Lord.

This is something our ancestors enjoyed a great deal more of. They spent so long washing clothes, making home-cooked meals and doing things "the hard way" since it was the only way, that their whole rhythm of life allowed them to spend more quiet time in prayer... the prayer of work.



Lesson One

*2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials,
3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces
steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you
may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Book of James - Chapter Two

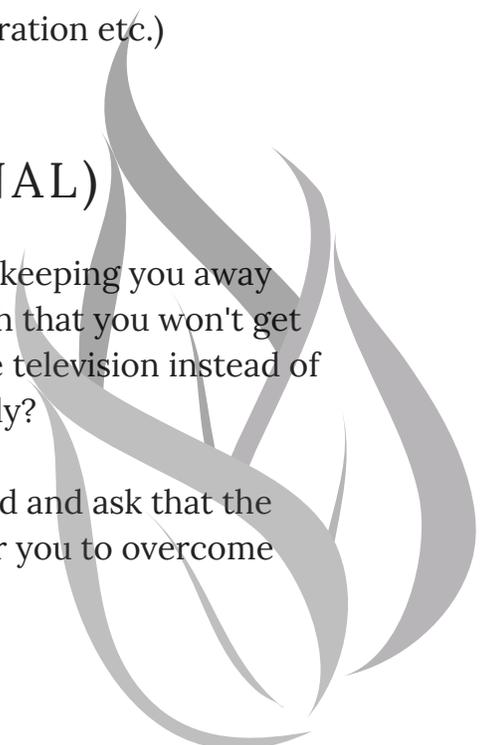
DISCUSSION

1. What are some difficult trials that have made you stronger and drawn you closer to God? Think of big ones like the loss of a loved one and smaller ones like not having a washer and dryer for a week!
2. Think of a time that seemed really difficult while you were going through it but years later paled in comparison to some of the trials you faced afterward. How can that give you perspective about what you're going through now?
3. When have you felt closest to the Lord in your life? Was there a trial that brought you close? Were you in a place of great peace at the time? What tools helped you (i.e. Bible reading, a good mentor, time in Adoration etc.)

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What comforts have you become accustomed to that are keeping you away from Jesus? For example, do you value your sleep so much that you won't get up 15 minutes early to pray? Do you prioritize prime-time television instead of reading the Bible or genuinely connecting with your family?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Two

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Book of James - Chapter Four

REFLECTION

How many times have we cried out the Lord for life to be easier? Please Lord, make this pain go away. James warns us not to pray simply to fulfill our worldly passions. In this, we experience a paradox since we also know that God wants to hear all the desires of our heart.

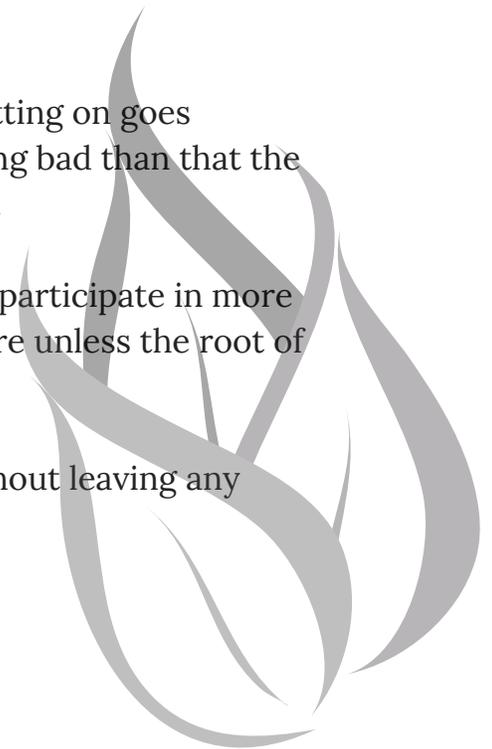
Yes, God wants to hear everything we desire, but if we are consistently praying for things and comforts of the world... if we are constantly praying for ways to feed our vanity while trying to disguise these desires as holy requests, then we are unfaithful creatures indeed!

This is a much easier trap to fall into than we think.

Perhaps you have prayed fervently that an event your putting on goes smoothly. You might be more concerned about not looking bad than that the atmosphere is conducive to encountering the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you wish you had more money so your kids could participate in more activities to enrich their lives. This is a perfectly fine desire unless the root of it is that you want to fit in with other moms.

Sometimes it's simply that we pray for what we want without leaving any space for what the Lord wants.



Lesson Two

“ . . . it is presumptuous in me to wish to choose my path, because I cannot tell which path is best for me. I must leave it to the Lord, Who knows me, to lead me by the path which is best for me, so that in all things His will may be done.”

St. Teresa of Avila

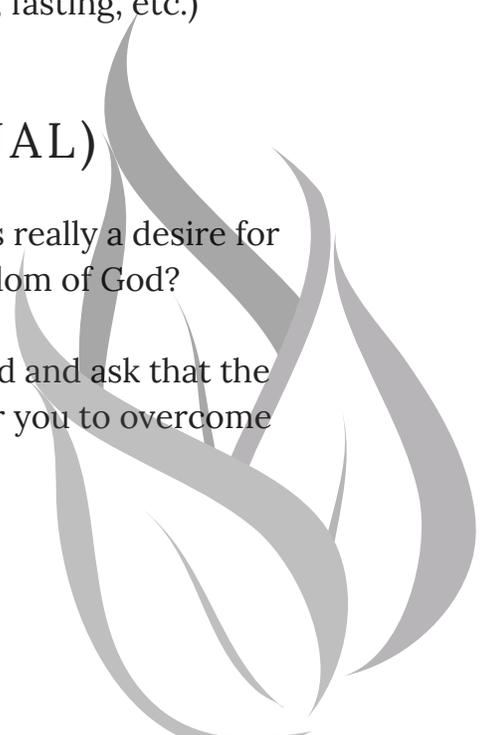
DISCUSSION

1. Are there any plans in your life that you are unwilling to surrender to God? If he said no to these plans, would that frighten you? Why?
2. What part of "friendship with the world" are you clinging to that's getting the way of your communion with Kingdom of God?
3. When tools could help you (or have helped you) to overcome the strong attraction and the shininess of the world so you can remain close to Jesus even in times of great temptation? Examples: reciting scripture in your mind that you've memorized, finding an accountability partner, fasting, etc.)

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What is a desire you have or have had in the past that was really a desire for something of the world instead of something of the Kingdom of God?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Three

“Our greatest gain is to lose the wealth that is of such brief duration and, by comparison with eternal things, of such little worth; yet we get upset about it and our gain turns to loss.”

St. Teresa of Avila

REFLECTION

How often do we think about our own death? How often do we think about the Kingdom of Heaven? Since these two things are tied together, it's easy to leave them both in the background. We move forward throughout our day without considering how numbered our days are and whether or not we're living them in a way that pleases God.

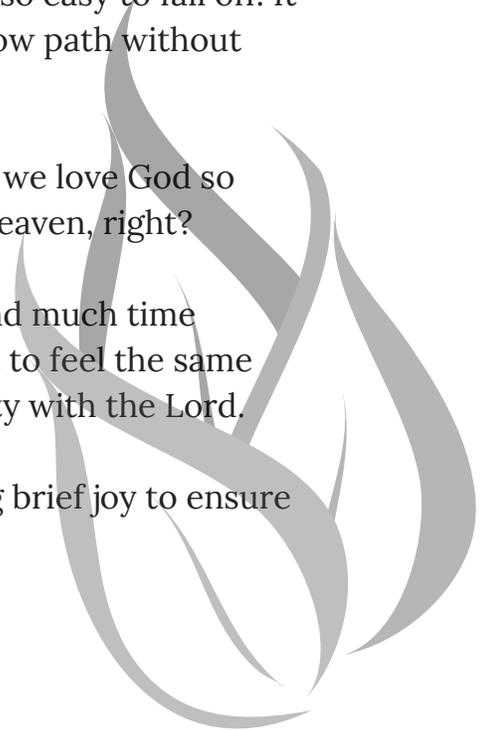
While we can be certain we fail the Lord each and every day, the good news is that His mercy is endless.

We cannot enjoy the grace of His mercy, however, if we are not even aware that we need to ask for it. We do not ask for His mercy if we do not dwell on the idea that the road to Heaven is narrow and it is every so easy to fall off. It can be easy to live in the trenches on the side of the narrow path without even realizing it.

We get comfortable with the idea that we go to Mass and we love God so we're probably doing all right. We're definitely going to Heaven, right?

Most of us though, shed a great number of tears and spend much time stewing in anger over things of this world when we ought to feel the same angst over our actions that keep us from spending eternity with the Lord.

Can we become brave enough to give up things that bring brief joy to ensure our eternal joy instead?



Lesson Three

*“Let nothing perturb you, nothing frighten you.
All things pass. God does not change.
Patience achieves everything.”*

St. Teresa of Avila

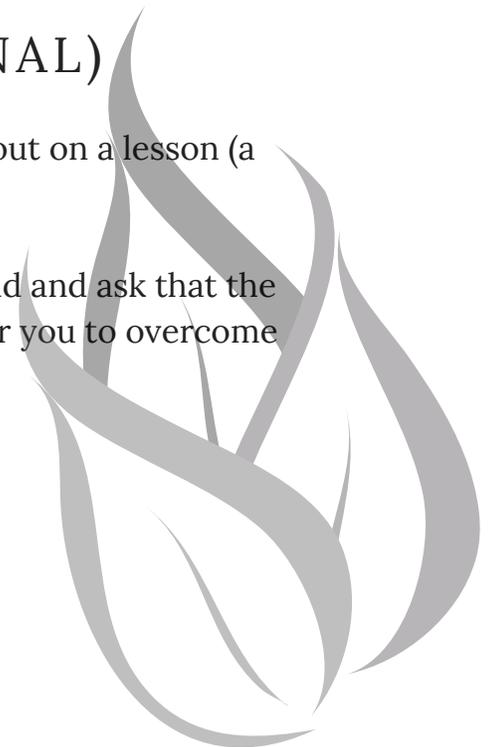
DISCUSSION

1. Think of a time when you were deeply upset by the loss of money or a thing. Looking back, in what way did this (or could this) loss have brought you closer to God and stored up treasure in Heaven?
2. What are you so frightened of right now that it keeps you up at night?
3. What are you feeling impatient about? Is it something of the world or is it something that threatens your path to Heaven?

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

When have you been so upset by a loss, that you missed out on a lesson (a gain) that God might have intended for you?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Four

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain"; 14 whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Book of James - Chapter Four

REFLECTION

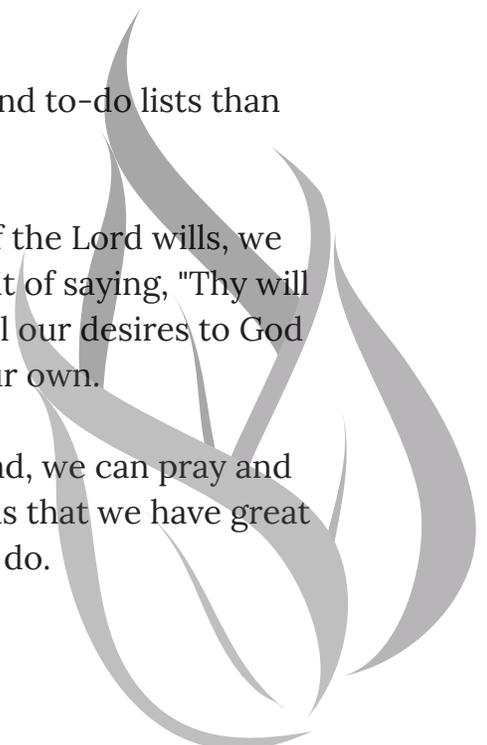
Many of us are avid goal setters and planner keepers. We have paper planners, Google calendars, wall calendars, and scratched out to-do lists all over the house. We want so desperately to feel as if we have control over our lives.

In the hustle and bustle, we don't want to sit quietly with the idea of our own mortality. Our days are numbered and no one but the Lord knows what that number is. The truth is, we're guaranteed nothing but today and for some, not even the whole day.

We can no more force the Lord to give way to our goals and to-do lists than we can demand the weather cooperate with our plans.

In all things, let us listen to the advice of James and say "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that." Let's get in the habit of saying, "Thy will be done," at the end of all our prayers. We may spill out all our desires to God but always end our prayers wanting His will more than our own.

Boasting is evil. We cannot be certain of the future. Instead, we can pray and try to discern God's will. We can tell our family and friends that we have great plans but none greater than doing what God wishes us to do.



Lesson Four

“May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.”

St. Teresa of Avila

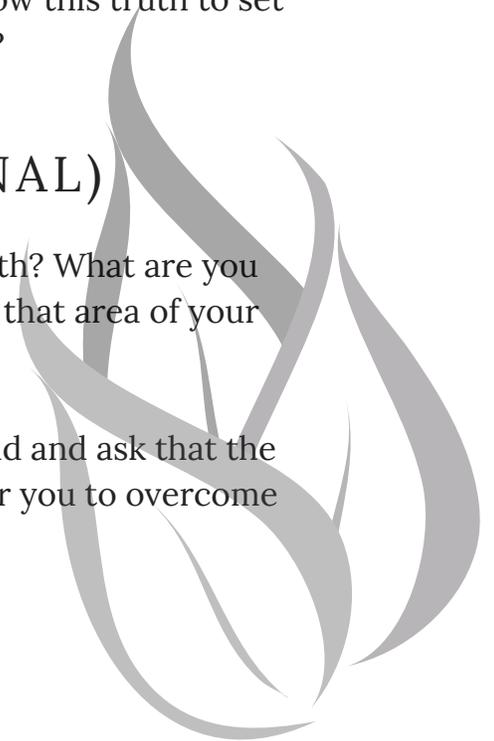
DISCUSSION

1. Do you really... really truly... trust that the Lord's plans are better than your own? What if those plans include great suffering that will lead you to Heaven?
2. What plans have you made in your life before that you were certain would happen but that got upended by God's plan instead?
3. Do you genuinely believe that you are a child of God? A child of the one true king? Do you believe this in your bones? How can you allow this truth to set your soul free leading you to sing, dance, praise and love?

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What part of your life are you scared to trust the Lord with? What are you clinging to so fiercely that you aren't giving Him space in that area of your life?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Five

“In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

St. Teresa of Avila

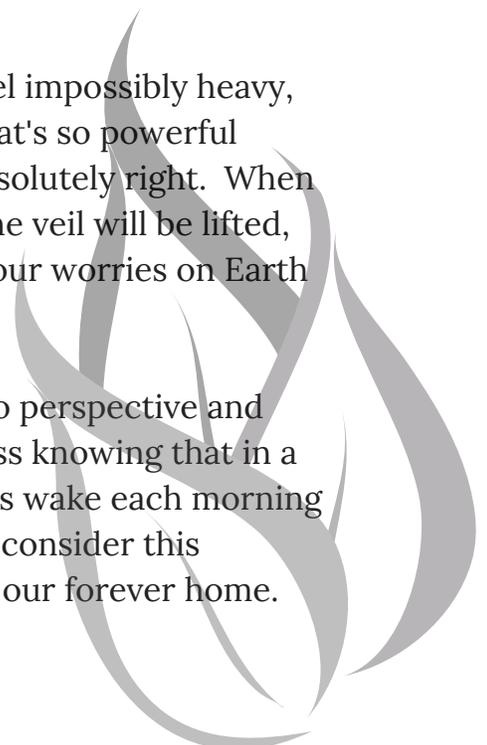
REFLECTION

So often the quotes from the saints feel dated or at the very least, hard to relate to knowing their sufferings stem from something like life in rural 17th century France. This quote is easily relatable, though. We can picture ourselves in a dank hotel room, on a thin and squeaky bed with a questionable shower and nothing but a vending machine for food. It's a yucky thought and yet we understand it's a temporary situation - a short night in a less than desirable place.

It's humbling to think that all our suffering on Earth can be compared with the fleeting time of one night in a bad hotel room. It feels nearly impossible for our minds to take in the idea of eternity in Heaven. Staring us in the face is the reality of our one life on Earth.

When our days feel long and the weight of our crosses feel impossibly heavy, life does not feel like one night in a hotel room. That's what's so powerful about this quote from St. Teresa of Avila because she's absolutely right. When we die and, Lord willing, pass into the Kingdom of God, the veil will be lifted, our eyes will finally be able to see how truly silly most of our worries on Earth were.

This wisdom does not lessen our pain but it can put it into perspective and allow us to feel more strength and joy in carrying our cross knowing that in a blink of an eye, we will be with the Lord in paradise. Let us wake each morning with the courage to tackle whatever the day brings as we consider this journey but a short sojourn on our way to our true home, our forever home.



Lesson Five

“One must not think that a person who is suffering is not praying. He is offering up his sufferings to God, and many a time he is praying much more truly than one who goes away by himself and meditates his head off, and, if he has squeezed out a few tears, thinks that is prayer.”

St. Teresa of Avila

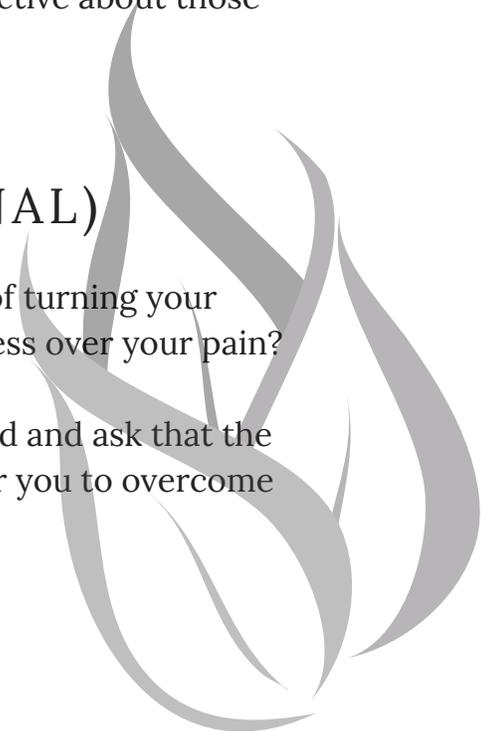
DISCUSSION

1. What suffering in your life is a great prayer to the Lord? Anything from major pain to daily annoyances counts!
2. Is there someone in your life who is undergoing great suffering either physically or mentally that you feel bitter toward? Can you change your heart toward them and view their suffering as a prayer to the Lord no matter how they are handling it?
3. What trials are you undergoing that feel much larger than "one night in a bad hotel" and how can you begin to change your perspective about those trials?

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

When have you experienced great suffering and instead of turning your suffering into prayer, you wallowed in bitterness or sadness over your pain?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Six

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7, 8 For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.

The Book of James - Chapter One

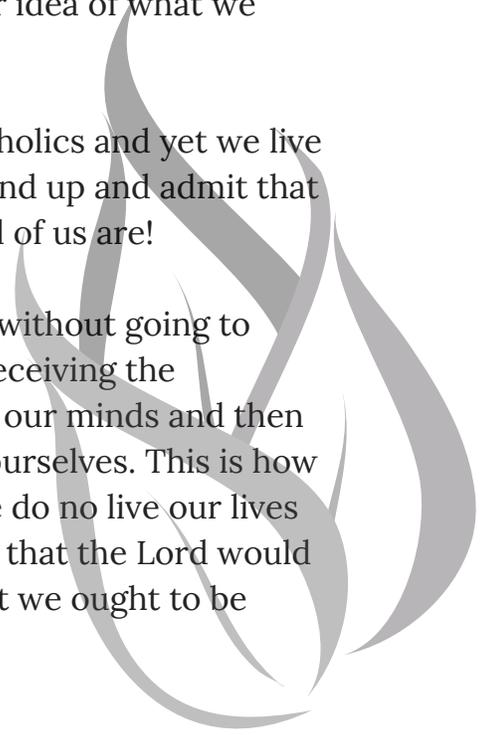
REFLECTION

Where there is a paradox, we find God. We are often told to trust the Lord completely by asking big things of Him. But then we are also told to trust God when our prayers go unanswered that His plans are better for us. How are we supposed to ask without doubting and yet be open to the fact that He may instead give us suffering to increase our holiness?

It's very confusing! It is often confusing, however, because we have saturated ourselves with the noise of the world instead of the silence of God. We allow inputs of television, social media, gossip, advertisements, and small competitions among our friends and family to distort our idea of what we want and what we think we truly need.

We really are double-minded because we say we are Catholics and yet we live a worldly life full of greed and pride. No one wants to stand up and admit that she is greedy and prideful and yet it's a guarantee that all of us are!

If we let too much time pass without reading our Bibles, without going to Adoration, without the cleaning of confession, without receiving the Eucharist... then our worldly inputs will start taking over our minds and then our prayers end up coming from an unstable version of ourselves. This is how we become hypocrites who say we are Catholic when we do not live our lives rooted in Catholicism. Then it would make perfect sense that the Lord would not answer our prayers because the prayers are not what we ought to be praying for.



Lesson Six

“The tree that is beside the running water is fresher and gives more fruit.”

St. Teresa of Avila

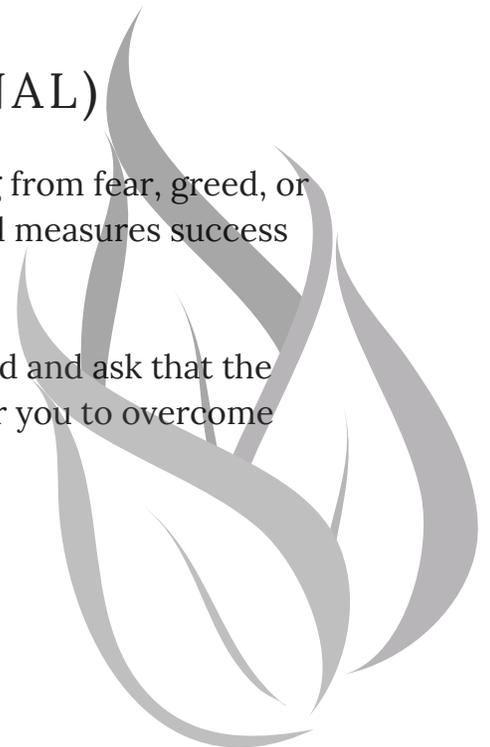
DISCUSSION

1. Are there ways your mind is disordered toward the world that cause your prayers to also be disordered?
2. What Catholic tools could you start using (or use more often) that would help you detach yourself from the world so you could pray more clearly for what is truly good and holy in your life?
3. Is your tree (your time and resources) planted by running water that is fresh (a good Catholic community and lots of prayer and exposure to sacraments?) If not, what can you add or take-away to help you produce more fruit?

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What are some of your current prayers that are springing from fear, greed, or pride? In what ways are you clinging to the way the world measures success instead of the way God measures success?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Seven

3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies.

4 Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God.

The Book of James - Chapter Three

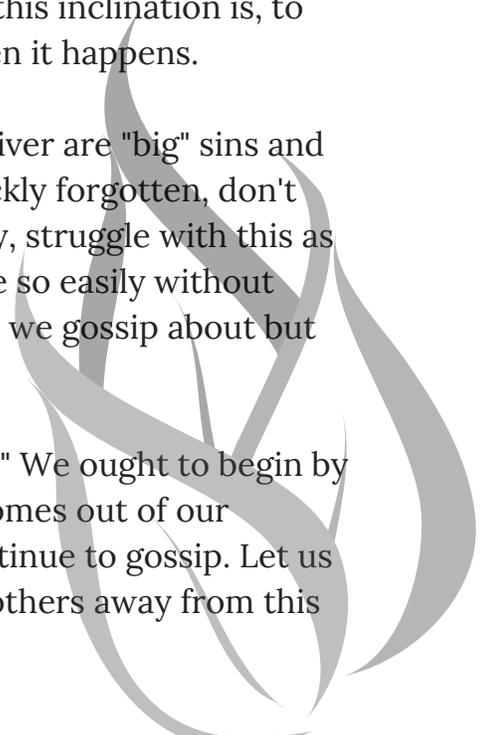
REFLECTION

These verses hit us right in the stomach. How well we are aware of the pain that our unchecked words can cause to those around us. When we speak sharp words to our spouses, our children, our co-workers, and even our friends, these small actions, these few seconds, can cause deep hurts.

It is important to take verse eight to heart and know that we are all born with original sin and our fallen nature means that we will make mistakes and sin with our cruel words. Our job is to recognize how easy this inclination is, to try our hardest to avoid it, and to confess it quickly when it happens.

How often do we run to confession over what we perceive are "big" sins and yet our hurtful words, thrown out quickly and then quickly forgotten, don't even make the list of sins to confess? Women, especially, struggle with this as we revel in the dark joy of gossip. We slip into this mode so easily without realizing the damage we're doing to not only the people we gossip about but the friend we're gossiping with as well.

St. Teresa says "Be gentle to all, and stern with yourself." We ought to begin by examining our words and holding a high bar for what comes out of our mouths while giving mercy to those around us who continue to gossip. Let us try to be God's light in our friend circle so we can lead others away from this common, and often overlooked, sin.



Lesson Seven

“We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God; for, beholding His greatness, we realize our own littleness; His purity shows us our foulness; and by meditating upon His humility we find how very far we are from being humble.”

St. Teresa of Avila

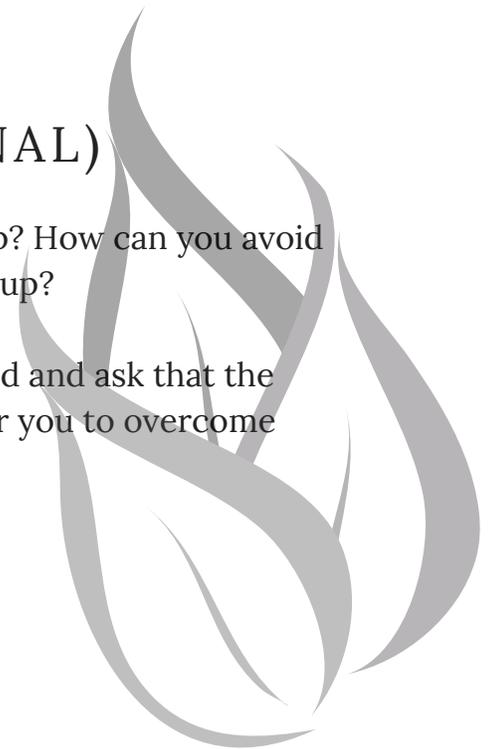
DISCUSSION

1. Do you recognize ways in which you are foul? In what ways can you get to know God more deeply to combat these?
2. How can you steer conversations in your life away from gossip and words that hurt others?
3. How can you meditate more on the humility of both Jesus and Mary so that it helps you to embrace your own humility of how small, weak, and broken you truly are? How can you also understand the Father's endless mercy and love for you?

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What situations lead you to say unkind words or to gossip? How can you avoid these situations or better manage them when they come up?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Lesson Eight

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. 18 And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The Book of James - Chapter Three

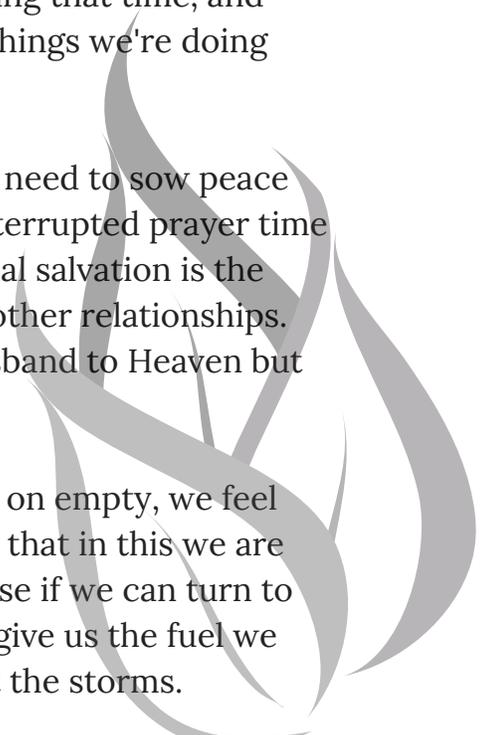
REFLECTION

We are deeply jealous and deeply selfish. It's an ugly truth and one we want to bury deep down and not think about! We are often so disordered in our life, that we create anxiety around things that have no worth. The things that keep us from God are no good at all. Even something that could be good, like cooking healthy meals from scratch, becomes wholly bad if it keeps us from our prayer lives.

We must make time for the Lord and stop letting our long to-do lists get in the way of our relationship with Him. Does He get the best of us or the rest of us? Now, of course, there are difficult seasons and all work we do can be an act of prayer but if we are not setting aside time, protecting that time, and really being present in that time for Christ, all the other things we're doing become tainted... they become poisoned.

We need the word of God as fuel to live out our lives. We need to sow peace by reading our Bibles and praying, really giving Him uninterrupted prayer time so that we may harvest righteousness. After all, our eternal salvation is the only thing that matters. It matters more than any of our other relationships. Yes, if you're married, it is your vocation to help your husband to Heaven but never at the expense of your own salvation.

This is tough to hear because we are tired, we're running on empty, we feel that we are failing in so many ways so it's painful to think that in this we are also failing. Yet there is great hope in this message because if we can turn to the Lord, if we can give ourselves over to prayer, He will give us the fuel we need to experience deep peace in our lives even amongst the storms.



Lesson Eight

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Book of James - Chapter One

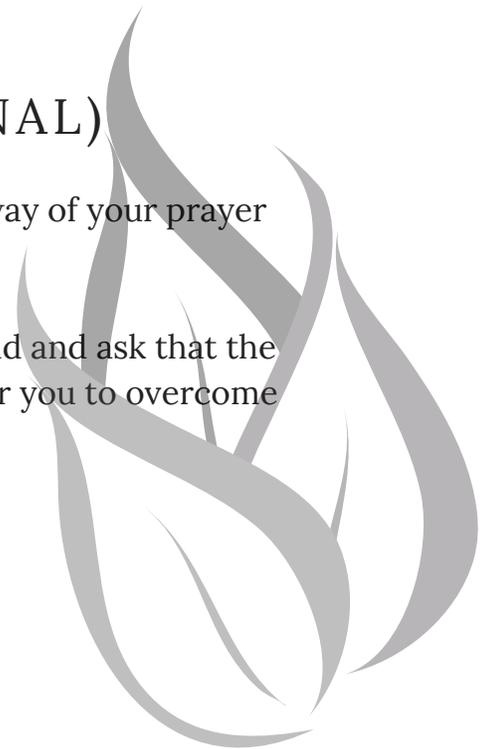
DISCUSSION

1. What is keeping you from spending thirty minutes of quality time in prayer with the Lord?
2. How can you ensure that you are opening your Bible every single day and reading the Word of God?
3. Are there activities that you ought to give up to carve out more peace in your life and time with the Lord (i.e. kid practices, television, over committing yourself to Church activities, giving children too much power over you etc.)

BRAVERY CHALLENGE (OPTIONAL)

What worldly activities have you been letting get in the way of your prayer time and your Bible reading?

If you're feeling brave today, speak your struggles out loud and ask that the group (if you're in one) and Sts. Teresa and James pray for you to overcome this struggle.



Message of Hope

This has been a study filled with tough love and difficult lessons. You have been challenged to loosen your grip on the world and your own plans and to give yourself over to prayer and the will of God. It's scary. It will take great courage to let go of some of the comforts that the world offers, even the comfort of how people perceive you, to choose a counter-cultural life that is centered on Christ.

The closer we grow to Christ, the more we experience His pain. It is impossible to carry that pain and to make that journey without the fuel God gives us in prayer and through reading the Bible.

Stop letting the world dictate where you spend your time, money, and energy. This life is fleeting, one bad night in a hotel. We are destined for paradise with the God for all eternity but the road is narrow and few will find it. Are you so certain that you are among the few? Are you ignoring the quiet sin of gossip, comparison, and desire for worldly comforts while at the same time complaining that you don't have enough time to pray or read your Bible?

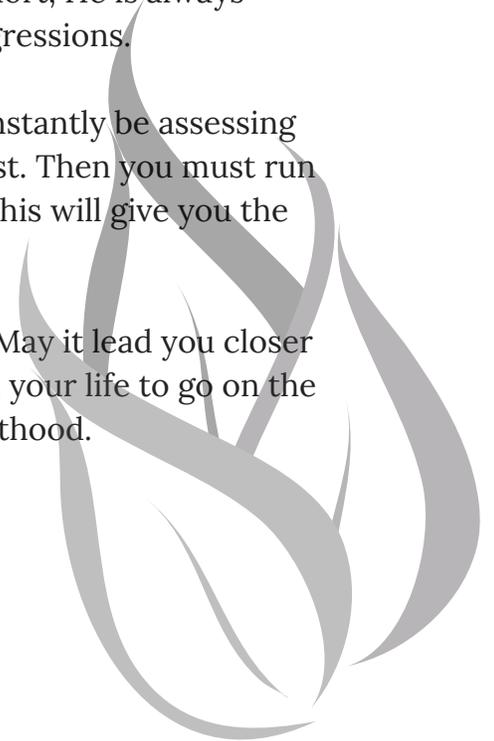
Your salvation is at stake. Don't take it for granted. You are meant to be a saint, that is God's desire for your life. This is a life-long process and one that takes a great deal of intentional living. The bar is high but the good news is His mercy is endless. No matter how many times you stumble and fall short, He is always there to forgive you and will immediately forget your transgressions.

To receive this great gift of His mercy though, you must constantly be assessing your actions to know when you choose the world over Christ. Then you must run to Him in prayer and in confession and beg for His mercy. This will give you the strength you need to keep fighting the good fight.

God bless you for growing in your faith through this study. May it lead you closer to Heaven and may you then turn around and lead others in your life to go on the same journey... the only real adventure worth living...to sainthood.

Blessings,

Sterling Jaquith

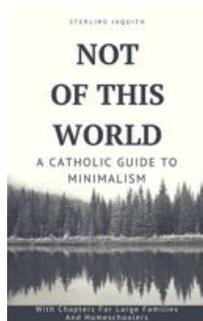


About The Author



STERLING JAQUITH is an adult convert. She met her husband on eHarmony. After declaring she'd never be religious or have children... she now finds herself a devout Catholic with five kiddos living in Idaho! She has written four books and is the host of the Coffee & Pearls podcast and the Catholic Minimalism Challenge. Join her every January for the Catholics Crush Goals workshop to make sure your year is anchored in Christ. Afterall, there is no better way to live.

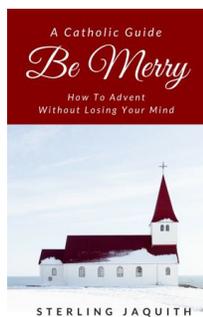
STERLING'S BOOKS



Can you be a minimalist with a large family? If you homeschool? Do you get to keep your iPhone? How is minimalism rooted in Catholicism? Sterling answers these questions and more in her most popular book!



What does sainthood look like among the piles of laundry, the mounting to-do list, and the stress of getting dinner ready? This system blends the power of Catholicism with discrete steps to manage life while still striving for sainthood.



Feel anxious thinking about November and December? Worried about decorations, presents, and surviving your crazy family? This is not what Jesus wants for the holidays. Discover how to avoid anxiety and depression this year!



Being can be frustrating in today's world with text messages, dating apps, and very little actual dating. Read these 37 real stories of the raw and genuine ways these Catholic women met their husbands.

FIND MORE OF HER WORK AT:

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www.catholicmom.com

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