



*A Retreat with a Wise Woman*  
*Teresa of Avila*

*In your hand I place my heart,  
Body, life, and soul,  
Deep feeling and affections mine,  
Spouse — Redeemer sweet,  
Myself offered now to you,  
What do you want of me?*

## *A Retreat with a Wise Woman*

Designed by Janet O. Hagberg

Teresa of Avila  
What do you want of me?

## *Introduction:*

This little guide contains a plan that you can use for a half-day guided retreat. The intent of this retreat is to help you quiet down and receive the gift God has for you. You have given yourself this time for your own nurture and growth and you can count on God being here to nurture you too.

Teresa of Avila is the inspiration for this retreat. She was a sixteenth century woman of faith who went through many obstacles on her way to a loving relationship with God. She can be a role model and a mentor for us, even today. Her writings and her life are an example of how we can live very much in the world and at the same time be intimately connected to a loving God who guides our way.

## *More about Teresa's faith:*

Teresa of Avila was deeply connected to God and at the same time she was earthy and practical. She once likened the spiritual life to a silk worm going about its work to create beauty. Another time she described the spiritual life as a trough of water for cattle and described the various ways we can fill our own troughs in order to gain sustenance as we move along in the spiritual process. She had a way of using every day examples to help us get beneath the surface of our lives and address our real issues.

Teresa was a nun and an active reformer who lived during the time of the Inquisition in Spain. It was not a safe or secure time and she was called before the Inquisitors more than once. Yet she persisted in her work, recording for us in her book, *The Interior Castle*, the journey to deepening our relationship with God. One of her favorite phrases was *Solo Dios Basta* translated Only God Suffices or God is Enough. She could be heard walking through the convent some days saying, "*Basta, Basta, Basta* " which means "Enough, enough, enough." In her lifetime she helped reform her order and she started more than a dozen other houses for nuns all over Spain.

Let us join Teresa in this retreat, listening to her wise words and letting her spirit comfort and sustain us. Let us move to scripture first and then to Teresa's prayer. Let yourself be comfortable and take some deep breaths to calm yourself in preparation for your retreat. Light a candle or put a shawl over your shoulders to feel the spirit of God in the room with you. Anticipate love and warmth as you move closer to God.

Stop for a moment here to simply ask God to be with you, to guide you during this special retreat time.

## *Scripture:*

The scripture for this retreat is Psalm 42:1, 2. There are two versions to choose from and you can see which one speaks most to your heart. The first is from the Revised Standard Version of scripture. The second one is a translation by Nan Merrill, gifted spiritual director, from her book, *Psalms for Praying*.

Begin by reading this scripture slowly a few times. Notice which words stand out or bubble to the surface of your mind. Ask God to show you what these words or ideas mean for you on this retreat. Write about anything that comes to your mind or heart after you have pondered these words. Use a journal or a notebook for recording your thoughts and reflections, or just write on these retreat pages if that is easier.

Psalm 42: 1,2. Revised Standard Version (RSV):

*As a hart longs  
for flowing streams,  
so longs my soul  
for thee, O God.*

*My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?*

Nan Merrill's *Psalms for Praying*:

*As a hart longs for flowing streams,  
so longs my soul for You,  
O Beloved.*

*My soul thirsts for the Beloved,  
for the Living Water.*

*When may I come and behold  
Your face?*

## *Teresa's Prayer:*

Read the prayer of Teresa below. As with the scripture, let her words settle into you, and savor the ones that are the most meaningful to you. Just sit quietly with the words that mean the most to you or let your mind and heart take you to the meaning that these words have for your life at the present moment.

*I am yours and born for You,*

*What do You want of me?*

*Majestic sovereign, Unending wisdom, Kindness pleasing to my soul; God sublime, one Being Good,*

*Yours, you made me,*

*Yours, you saved me,*

*Yours, you endured me,*

*Yours, you called me,*

*Yours, you awaited me,*

*Yours, I did not stray.*

*What do you want of me?*

*In your hand*

*I place my heart,*

*Body, life, and soul,*

*Deep feeling and affections mine,*

*Spouse-Redeemer sweet,*

*Myself offered now to you,*

*What do You want of me?*

*Give me, if You will, prayer;*

*Or let me know dryness,*

*An abundance of devotion,*

*Or if not, then barrenness.*

*In You alone, Sovereign Majesty,*

*I find my peace,*

*What do you want of me?*

*Yours I am, for you I was born;*

*What do You want of me?*





## *Self Nurturing:*

Part of the joy of being on retreat is doing things for yourself that are nurturing. You may want to take a walk outdoors. Or you could take a nap. You could do some stretching exercises, or listen to quiet music or knit or use art materials to express your feelings and reflections. As you let Teresa's question settle into you, ask Jesus to be present as your spirit takes in the truths you are discovering. Ask Jesus to show you and guide you to what this means for your life.

If you walk or exercise or nap, be aware of the thoughts that come to you, the memories that surface, the feelings that bubble up, the quiet little voice in your mind that nudges you. These are the Spirit's ways of speaking to you. Let God's love direct this retreat and bring you what your soul longs for, like the deer longing for the flowing streams. Write what you experience or what you discover in your journal or on these retreat papers if that is helpful for you.

Take nurturing time for yourself now.

## *Next Steps: Spiritual Reading, Spiritual Direction*

Consider reading more about the spiritual life or about Teresa of Avila. If you are interested, there are books available about Teresa's life and teachings. And the internet has many resources devoted to her. One such web site is [www.praythenews.com](http://www.praythenews.com) It is administered by the Order that Theresa founded. On that site you can light a candle and send in a prayer request. Another follow-up idea is to arrange to meet with a spiritual director, a person who can, listen to your story, ask insightful questions and walk with you on this spiritual journey in the future.

These are ways to further your understanding and learn more about what God might be calling you to in your life. Pursuing additional reading or listening to tapes on the inner life are both very enriching and many times they bring up ideas and practices that you are drawn to but knew nothing about until now. Let yourself explore more resources for your inner life.

Explore these resources now if you are drawn to them or if you brought books or a computer with you in preparation for this retreat.

*The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avila, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Paulest Press, NY, 1979.



*The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, Teresa of Avila, edited by E. Allison Peers, Doubleday and Co, Garden City, NY, 1960.

*Let Nothing Disturb You*, Teresa of Avila, a 30 Day Reading Guide, Ed. John Kirvan, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1996.

*The Soul's Passion for God; Selected Writings of Teresa of Avila*, Ed. Keith Beasley-Topliffe, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN, 1997.

## *Benediction: Closing your retreat*

Be aware of the riches of this time alone, of what a gift you have given yourself on this retreat, even if it surfaced difficult things that need attending. God desires our ever-deepening relationship and even entices us with wonderful surprises. Was there a surprise on your retreat today?

Jan Richardson, in *Sacred Journeys*, offers this benediction to close your retreat. Soak in these words and absorb Teresa's wisdom, wisdom of a spirit-filled woman of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Read and pray this benediction as you prepare to leave

*May the God who holds all hearts,  
Offers balm for all wounds,  
And breaks the chains of all who suffer,  
Bless you now to go forth dancing,  
Bearing Freedom in your arms*

Thank God for the grace or insight you have received today. Be grateful for your life. Write any summaries or unanswered questions in your journal. You can look at these words again in the future to remind you of the love you shared at this retreat.

Amen, Go in Peace.