

Turning to the Mystics



Dialogue: The Second Mansion

Jim Finley: music] Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. [bell]

Kirsten Oates: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. In this season, we're turning to St. Teresa of Ávila and looking at her beautiful book the Interior Castle. In today's episode, I will continue to engage Jim in a dialogue going a little deeper into mansions one, two and three. Last week, we covered mansion one. And today, we'll look at mansions two and three. Before we start, maybe we could just do a recap of mansion one and kind of the key takeaways about mansion one. Do you want to start there?

Jim Finley: Sure. We enter the first mansion of the soul at those points in our life where God's presence in our life becomes personally meaningful to us and where we realize that while our lives have an outside, through external events and circumstances, our life also has an inside. And that interiority of our life in which God is present becomes something personally important that we feel drawn to, to stabilize our self in. But it's difficult because when we first find our way into this first mansion, our heart is still divided with the external pressures, and concerns, and complexities, and all of that.

And so, Teresa says people in the first mansion, they do pray but they don't pray well, and they don't pray often. It's hard to find the time for it. And then when you do pray, it's hard to deal with the distractions, and so on. So, it's the gift of it. But you're also feeling the challenge of learning how to stabilize in this kind of more attentive state, present to God? And that whole process of that is like first mansion realities, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you. And then, Jim, how does the movement take place between mansion one and mansion two?

Jim Finley: This idea of the door that leads to the second mansion being prayer, humility, and experiential self-knowledge. I think another characteristic of the first mansion, also, is for the first time, we try to clarify the meaning of basic things, like, what does God mean, or, like, why does God love me? What does it mean I have a soul, or what is the mind? We just hear these things, but for the first time, I think we try to sort out how to understand what they mean and how to be faithful to them.

And, also, for Teresa, she's assuming here, this is in the Christian tradition of discipleship, that is the first beginnings of seeking discipleship. So, what happens is that it's very personal to each person over a period of weeks or months, whatever it is, of just consistently, every time we stumble and fall and slip away and come back again, stumble and fall and come back again, the cumulative effect of that sustained sincerity reaches a certain point that it opens the way to the second mansion, which is a more kind of interior sensitivity or awareness of the first mansion reality, but now the interiority of it is more clear. It has atmospheric intimacy about it that it didn't have in the first mansion.

Kirsten Oates: And, Jim, we were talking earlier that Teresa doesn't spend a ton of time on the second mansion, but that doesn't represent how important the second mansion is.

Jim Finley: Yes. She says it, it just has one chapter, but she says the reason it's so brief is, she says, "I've dealt with it at length elsewhere." So, she wrote two books prior to this one. This is the last book she wrote before she died. And so, this first mansion and going into the second mansion, it dealt with at length, and one of the books was her life, her spiritual autobiography, and it was dealt with in chapters 11 through 13.

And the other book was *The Way of Perfection*, and that was in chapters 20 to 24. So, the listeners could go there if they're interested, and we could see there are more extended writings. She saw how important it was to be grounded in this. So, right here, she's kind of synthesizing it. We're just touching on some key points in it. But that's why it's so brief here, not that it's not important.

And even the point that she makes here in this one chapter, as we look at it, we can see the importance of it, these things that she's referring to, because they're so practical and real as we move in closer to God in our life.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. I'm going to read a quote. It's from the second mansion, chapter 1, and I'd just love to have you reflect on it, Jim. This is early in the chapter, and I'm reading from the translation by Mirabai Starr. So, she says, "But the rooms of the second dwelling are harder to navigate. Souls in the first dwelling have the dubious advantage of being both deaf and dumb. Since they can hear nothing anyway, their inability to speak doesn't bother them much. To be able to hear but unable to say anything is torment." I guess she's saying in the first mansion, you can't hear, and you can't speak, but in the second mansion, you can hear, but you can't speak. Could you—

Jim Finley: Yes. I'm going to make a comparison. Let's say two people meet and one of the two people starts feeling very drawn to this other person. They're hoping that it might be possible to establish an intimate relationship. So, in their initial, ongoing conversations, this interested person started sending out little signals, putting the signals out about "What do you think? Should we move in a little closer?"

And this person who's beginning to feel this way about this person can tell that when the person drops the clues, the person doesn't get any of the clues; that is, the person is oblivious to the initiations or the invitations to intimacy because they're not tuned into it for different reasons. So, she says the same thing happens in the first mansion in a way. We're brought into it, but we're still tone deaf.

And then when we do pick it up, like we do start getting the call, we start hearing this voice of God speaking to us through the Gospels, whatever, life, we don't know what to say. We don't have a language to express this newly emerging sensitivity in our life. We don't have the vocabulary for it. And yet, we also don't know what we don't know, so ignorance is bliss. In a way we don't know, but we just are newcomers on the scene.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And she talks about the torment of that, and I wonder if part of that is that the experiences, the internal experiences, are so hard to describe, but you want other people to get it, you want other people to know what you're experiencing, but it's so hard to communicate.

Jim Finley: Yeah. So, I want to move a little closer into the first mansion. You can tell this person wants

to get it, let's say here with God. You can tell they're sincere. But what is also true in the first mansion is the person himself or herself wants to get it, and they don't know how to get it. In other words, they can tell the very thing that brought them into the first mansion, through love or the loss of love, or prayer, or whatever that was, something that touched their life, it does matter. But they don't know what it is that matters, and they don't know why it matters. They know it in general, that it's my faith and the tradition, they would know it's Christ, or my faith. They would know that, but it's encrypted to them. You know what I mean? They deal with that.

Kirsten Oates: And then in the second mansion—

Jim Finley: Well, what happens in the second mansion then is that they struggle with that, and stay with it, and be patient with it, and it starts to get clearer. And, also, we're back to this idea of reptiles again. They become more consciously aware if reptiles are habits of the mind and heart, that they compromise the union that we're looking for. They're like internalized patterns in our heart.

And so, it happens in the second mansion. In the first mansion, we just kind of assume that it was just the way it is, or maybe we were careless when we got in, and we forgot to close the door, and the reptiles are free to move in and out, and we go in and out. It's that kind of thing.

But in the second mansion, she says it's harder in the second mansion, and yet the person in the second mansion is better off. It's harder. One, better off because they're closer. And they're also better off because they realize the seriousness or the extent to which these habits of the mind and heart are patterns that have become woven into their survival patterns. That is, they're kind of wired into the reactivity, or the avoidance, or the whatever, you know? It's personal for each person.

So, in other words, there are patterns within their heart that are resisting letting go of us so we can move closer. And then we realize we're traumatically bonded to that resistance, so we're divided in our heart. And so, it's harder because we realize the depth of the division. It's like Paul, the things we want to do, we don't do, the things we don't want—the thorn in the flesh—and it becomes painful. It becomes very, very clear, like how deep-seated and poignant these persistent patterns are.

And the person finds it difficult, but they're actually better off because it awakens humility, which is a deepened dependency on God to help them understand, sort through, and to help free them from these patterns.

Kirsten Oates: That's a good description. I can feel the sense of torment that might come about. It's like that this path of awakening where you can see more of God and more of your own humanity, but it's still very challenging to make the changes necessary—

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: --to have the stable experience.

Jim Finley: Like so near yet so far away. Like I can tell it's right there.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: There's a strange distance within myself from what it is so strangely close, and I don't know how to get to it. And then, furthermore, I'm kind of invested in the distance that won't let go of me. And it has to do with patterns of survival strategies formed in trauma, abandonment, and different things where it's like we're afraid to lose the control that we think that we have over the life we think that we're living. And these survival patterns, even though they disappoint us and they're constricting, just how to get vulnerable enough to move beyond them and think we can be safe at the same time. In a way, it's a kind of trust issue, I think.

And, also, we don't yet understand the tender mercy of God that's with us in the struggle and giving us the courage to see the struggle and be present to the struggle. We don't yet recognize the gift of the struggle itself. The very fact it troubles us so much is a sign that we're already transcending it because if we weren't transcending it, it wouldn't trouble us so much.

Kirsten Oates: Well, that's hope for those of us that can see, yeah—

Jim Finley: It is hopeful.

Kirsten Oates: --habits and patterns. Jim, just reading again where she talks about the second mansion on page 56. *"I am not saying that God calls to us directly here, as he will do later. For now, his voice reaches us through words spoken by good people, through listening to spiritual talks, and reading sacred literature. God calls to us in countless little ways all the time. Through illnesses and suffering, and through sorrow he calls to us."*

Jim Finley: Yes. You know there's another thing here in the second mansion, too, that will segue into this. What we don't yet see in the second mansion, but the more we stay with it, we start to see it, and then it gets clearer in the third mansion. What we don't see is the extent there's a sense in which it doesn't matter whether we get beyond these things or not because we're attributing authority to these distancing behaviors over the love that loves us so in the midst of the distancing behaviors. See?

I do need to do my best to get past these things. That's the imperative, but the ideology of a perfectionism, as if somehow I could get past this, it would just be more of me. What I don't yet discover, which is the Good News of Jesus Christ, is that we're intimately loved through and through and through and through in the very inabilities that we're trying to get past. And these are the sensitivities that start to be given to us in the second mansion, the intimacy of the struggle.

And then she's saying these things come to us. We don't yet hear the voice directly as we will in the later mansions. It's not the inner voice of God, but we're touched in hearing the intonations of God's voice in the voice of someone giving a homily. Or we're touched by the intimations of God's voice in reading a book that touches us. Or we're touched by God's presence in the presence of a person in whose presence we sense the goodness of God that we're so blessed to have this person in our life. We're blessed. How strange it is that we landed in a certain situation. We couldn't have planned it if we tried and how God providentially led us do this very place, maybe in

spite of ourselves. And that's where we start to see like the wonder of it all, like this strange, providential path that we're on. And so, these are new sensibilities or sensitivities that start to grow within us in the second mansion. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And she says that God rejoices when we experience the intimacies.

Jim Finley: Exactly. Because God knows where we're headed. See, God knows. These are foreshadows of greater things yet to come. And so, what we don't see yet, I think, sometimes it's the thing that's the most subtle that's the gate of heaven; that is, just a very unimposing delicacy of the stirring. That's the opening into the deeper place, but we're not yet refined enough. We haven't yet calibrated our heart to a refined enough scale to like tune into that frequency and stay there. That's what we learn in the second mansion, I think, with patience and humility. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, just a question on that, as we go deeper, so she's saying in the second mansion, we hear God in the intimations, more seeing God in others than in ourselves. But as we go deeper, we still see God in others. It's not like we're going to turn the mirror just completely on ourselves.

Jim Finley: Well, two things; one, is we see it in others. What she's saying, too, we simultaneously are seeing it in our self.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: In other words, we're inside our self in the midst of our limitations. There's something qualitatively more to us than we were aware of, and that's also occurring. So, it isn't just us, isn't just others, who we often see the same thing is happening within ourselves. But still in the second mansion, it's still coming into focus. It's still coming into focus. And then, also, it isn't as if other people, as it comes into focus about us, other people fall into the background because through the whole book, she's going to be saying that the measure of the authenticity of this is our love for other people. The connection between awakening and the corporate works of mercy, or awakening, and social justice, awakening and sensitivity to the suffering of others, that's kind of the measure, really, of this authenticity and a corresponding sensitivity to our self, which is to love our neighbor as our self, not instead of ourselves. And so, that's how this is sifting out, I think.

Kirsten Oates: That's so powerful and something we can use to measure each day, you know, kind of looking at our relationships. and how we're treating people and how we're acting in the world.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I think, also, when we read the second mansion, we can say there's someone that they relate to this. They say, "I think I'm a second mansion person. I relate to this. It speaks to me." Because then they go, "Wow, second mansion, I've got five more to go. Unless this kicks in pretty quickly, this isn't looking good." [laughter] You know what I mean? I just don't know really. [laughter]

But another way of looking at it, if you died, a second mansion person would be a great life. What an achievement really to be stabilized in these kinds of sensitivities, these kinds of lessons. It's really the holiness of the ordinary life or the efficacy of it all, I think, is probably

where we learn this, in the second mansion. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That's so beautiful. Just looking still in the second mansion, I wanted to focus on how she talks about the memory, the will, and the intellect.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Should I just read a little bit?

Jim Finley: That would be good, yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. *"When the soul compares all those worldly things to that which she is seeking, reason suggests that they may not be altogether worthless. But faith teaches the soul exactly what will make her whole. Memory demonstrates the impermanence of worldly thing, [. . .]. The will, after seeing countless signs of love, inclines the soul to love in return."* And then about the intellect she says, *"The intellect steps in to help the soul understand that she can never hope to have a better friend as long as she lives."*

Jim Finley: You know, sometimes in kind of a medieval Christian like philosophical theology of Aquinas and Duns Scotus, and so on, to which she was somewhat familiar—John of the Cross certainly was because he was trained in the seminary—they have this idea of faculty psychology, like the faculties of the soul. And so, the higher powers of the soul are the intellect, the memory, and the will. What we're talking about is the deepening or clarification, the purifying of the faculties of the soul.

And so, what's happening really is that we realize, one, it's paradoxical. On one hand, we're realizing the gift of our mind, and the gift of our will, and the gift of our memory, but we also realize that our previous modes of knowing, and desiring, and remembering were, in the light of the illuminations we're receiving, were blunted. And that somehow, on the one hand, we were kind of overly stating them as being enough for us. Yet, at the same time in our respect for them as a gift from God, we're realizing that they kind of are embodiments or incarnations that God's presence meant to be doorways, were modes into this deeper place, through a kind of a knowing that there really is a deeper way to know deeper things, where there is kind of a desire to know that there is a way to conform my desire, my will to the will of God. And so, I can transform my will to be in alignment with God's will, through love, and how in the memory, like my own sacred history, I've been so strangely led right up to this moment where I'm discovering these things.

So, that's where it's headed. It has to do with these transformative things about an impoverished, blunted understanding and now we're moving into a heightened understanding as kind of doorways into yet the deeper realms yet to come. Like, we become a more reflective person where the importance of being attentive in a loving way, it's kind of deepening those kinds of things, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Would it be right to say that there's a new reference point kind of for what we're thinking about and different kinds of thoughts that reference to the mystery of God, to the love of God, and the same with the experience of what we want to do with our will? It's kind of what you were saying with the verses from Paul, like I'm noticing my will in a new referenced way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I think so. What's coming to me now, and we'll go into him later in this series—we'll see what God has in mind—but you know Rilke, Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to A Young Poet. In one of the first letters in that collection is where this young poet is sending these poems to Rilke as an established poet, "Let me know if they're any good." And Rilke says, "You're looking outward, that you must stop doing. You must ask yourself in the stillest hour of your darkest night must I write poetry? And if the response is a clear and simple yes, you must build even life's most unassuming moments in fidelity to that inner necessity."

See, that's what's starting to happen here. There was an awakening to a qualitatively richer awareness of a qualitatively richer sense of the nearness of God in my life. And I'm reordering my life in the light of that light that illumined me is drawing me into itself. There's like this qualitative deepening of obediential fidelity to this, and it's still newly emerging. It goes out of focus a lot. You can tell we're kind of tuning in to something. We're trying to stay beamed into is this constancy, like this, because it's still in the second mansion, it still goes out of focus. And so, we don't want to depend on God and ask for God's help, but that's how we grow. That's how we're being transformed by that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. I like that phrase, that "we're reordering our life."

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's really helpful, internally and externally.

Jim Finley: Exactly, according in fidelity to this love.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: See, it's a reordering. There's like a higher order imperative of our awakened heart, and our life is being reordered. In AA, keep the first thing the first thing, where Jesus "Put first the kingdom of God." And the kingdom of God is Jesus' metaphor for this, for this loving presence of God in your life, so it's that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: How do the three hinges, how are they operating in mansion two the prayer, humility, and self-knowledge? I guess we've been talking a little bit about all three already, but—

Jim Finley: Well, I'd say, see, to me, I think the reason prayer is so important is that, see, without prayer, this just tends to be ideas. We can write it down in a book and underline it, and, oh, that's a beautiful thought, see? But what happens in prayer is we commit ourselves to be sincerely engaged with God, who's accessing our life in this way. There's a kind of an intimate sincerity in a rendezvous of engagement. And so, that's what makes prayer such a fertile place. And that's why the more we develop the habit of prayer, we develop a habit of staying in the circle, that rendezvous of this prayer. And then what happens in the rendezvous is we're never humiliated, but we're endlessly humbled. That is, we realize in the prayer how inept we are of being able to stay steadfast in this unwavering love that's entering our life amidst all of our turmoil. And so, we're humbled in it and that humility is self-knowledge. See, I'm trying to learn from God how to join God, who God knows me to be as unexplainably lovable in all my wayward ways. And so, that three-fold pattern you kind of see going on here, and it will keep going on through all the levels really until the sixth and seventh.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I'm just reminded the way you spoke about self-knowledge in mansion one about it's our knowledge of ourselves in relation to God, and it's that back and forward.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And all of a sudden, the simplest words of Jesus take on a new meaning, you know, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged." And we realize we judge our self all the time. And sometimes we're pretty punitive towards our self and pretty harsh.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And sometimes we judge others, maybe we start to realize we're really not qualified to judge, or the judgment's already been made, but it's been made by God, who's judged us with mercy in taking us to himself, which is the mystery of the cross. And so, it's a transformation of judgment. And then in that mercy, then in the moral imperative, Paul says does this mean we can go out and sin all the more? God forbid. There's the moral imperative then in living in fidelity to that, that my peace isn't dependent on my ability to live up to it. It's dependent on the God that loves me so in the midst of my ongoing inability to live up to it, and that's how I'm being transformed.

And then little by little, what happens in the third mansion, psychological spiritual maturity. See, I said, that's where I say we reach cruising level. We start to stabilize in psychological spiritual maturity. So, we're less chaotic. We're less fragmented. The insides match the outsides. We're more stabilized in this process, like a learning curve of virtue, through God's grace, [music] and we look back to where we used to be ten years ago or five years ago, we can tell something's happening. You know, we're a work in progress.

Kirsten Oates: Building on your example of judgment, so if I'm someone who does judge and criticize myself really harshly internally, is that what Teresa is referring to, would that be one of my reptiles?

Jim Finley: Yes. So, another reptile is a lax conscience. It's "I'm cavalier about her full attitudes [31:40]. It doesn't bother me. I'm indifferent towards it, or I addictively numb it." That's another reptile. And so, the reptiles are the patterns that compromise stabilizing in this clarity. But let's say in our particular pattern, is we've internalized a punitive voice. We catch our self in the act of being punitive toward the part of us that needs to be loved the most. See, the part of us that still falls like this. And so, we're learning how to hand our self over to God teaching us to be more tender hearted, more patient to ourselves, and to everyone around us, too. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Because what happens, what we do externally, we tend to do internally. Is that the way we look at the matching of the internal and the external, so if I judge others harshly, it's likely I'm judging myself harshly as well?

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. And, also, I think we're getting ahead of ourselves a little bit where it gets even more refined. You see, if I judge myself harshly, in a way, it's clear that's something to overcome. See, but in a way, if I wouldn't be so harsh, I might start to cry. In other words, my harshness toward myself is masking. See, just beneath the anger is the pain; just beneath the pain is the powerlessness. And so, my posing and posturing with the harshness really is how I paradoxically try to maintain myself through harshness.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But just underneath it, you can also see what it would be like to have St. Teresa as a spiritual director because she would sit with us and ask us to talk to her. And then she'd join us where we're at with this. So, what she has to do in this book then is just give general patterns, which over time, she knows tend to be true. And each of us is a unique edition of this universal story. So, she's mapping up like the inscape of the soul, these patterns so we can kind of see what applies and how it applies and like that.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. Yes, it's interesting to think about something like judgment as a survival strategy that we're using it to hide something vulnerable and so in that way, it's a necessary survival strategy because the exposure of that vulnerable place feels like it could be the end of us.

Jim Finley: Really, it's like Shakespeare, "Methinks thou dost protest too much." All this intense, but what's underneath the ideological intensity? But another thing that's happening is we're being called to have our judgment metamorphosized by love. And so, there's a qualitatively new kind of judging in the order of mercy, in the order of humility, this idea of being rigorously honest and endlessly tender hearted. And so, my judgment is then in accordance with this newly emerging way to be in the world, really.

Kirsten Oates: I love the thought of being in spiritual direction with Teresa, and I do find a lot of encouragement. This is on page 61. "And if you fall sometimes, do not lose heart. Keep striving to walk your path with integrity. God will draw out the good even from your fall, just as the man who sells antidotes will drink poison to test their effectiveness."

Jim Finley: Wow. By the way, I want to share something. When I was with Thomas Merton at the monastery, and it was very similar to me having Teresa of Ávila as a spiritual director. Do you know what I mean? I just sensed I was in the presence. The thing is, with these mystics—it's true of Merton's writings—she's so clear, and she's so moved in the desire to be helpful.

When we read her in a prayerful way, we do have Teresa as a spiritual director. I mean that's the *Lectio* of sitting with her. But we have to do more on our part because she's not right there to coach us. So, we have to take to heart and walk with how it applies in kind of a discernment process, I think. But, yeah, that's the artistry of it, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: And just a couple of things that I saw that she notes that a kind of the sense of what we're building in the second mansion, she says, "Trust more in the mercy of God and less in your own judgment," which is what we were talking about earlier.

Jim Finley: We were talking about it earlier, yes, that's right. And, also, this idea, the quote you gave earlier—I've made references before and I don't know if I mentioned it—when St. Benedict first founded the monastic life in the 5th century, and there's a story that someone asked him, "What do you monks do in the monastery all day?" And he said, "Fall down and get up; fall down and get up; fall down and get up."

And so, in a way, if every time we fall, we seek to learn the lesson about our self in where we just before we fell, what was going on, and what is it that one more time blindsided us. And if I could turn towards it to become more consciously aware of it, I might be able

to be better prepared the next time it starts to make a move on me. And so, our fall then, each of these series of falls in our lessons to reinstate our self in the mercy of God and, also, to understand what is it that perpetuates the patterns, and what is it about me that is so invested in them? Because unless that part of me that's invested in them senses that I, with God's grace, understand it and why it does that, it won't feel safe with me. It won't. It has to trust that it's safe to come out from behind the curtain of experiential self-knowledge to see what the impetus of these patterns are, that we can kind of see the possibility of them being transformed, or we might be released from their hold on us.

Kirsten Oates: I'm pausing because there's a noise. Can you hear it, Corey (producer)?

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's here on my end. Is it a buzzing noise? There's a leaf blower outside my window.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. Is that okay to keep going, Corey?

Jim Finley: It stopped.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. It just came out of nowhere.

Jim Finley: Do you know why? Friday is the gardener day. Tuesday is the garbage truck day. [laughter] Friday is the gardener day. So, we're kind of navigating, so next time we'll know to be careful of Fridays and Tuesdays anyway.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But if it's okay, Corey, is it okay? It's good enough? Okay, we'll keep going. Real life, yeah, real life.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, what you're just describing, this is kind of psychotherapy, this is a phase of kind of working through troubled places in ourselves?

Jim Finley: Yes, as it moves us into contemporary terms. So, I would say to me, the second mansion is where psychotherapy and spirituality touch each other. See, as we're spirit, this is where we do our inner work on addressing these issues at the level at which they occur because we discover we can't pray them away; hence, we look at them at their own level.

Kirsten Oates: Right.

Jim Finley: But unless we look at them by their own level, grounded in God to guide us, it's reductionistic, impoverished. So, we're looking for an integrative approach for this transformation. I think a lot of that goes on in this second mansion and then matures and gives a broader base in the third mansion, which is a continuation of the second, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Teresa was very sophisticated to be able to describe psychotherapy in such a powerful way with the lizards.

Jim Finley: She's amazing. No, she really was an amazing woman, absolutely. It was interesting when I was in Ávila with Carolyn Myss giving the retreat there, when I was in the monastery there, they had a copy there of the Interior Castle, and she wrote it by hand, first draft. Amazing. She just had an amazing, pragmatic gift for putting words to subtle things. She was gifted

with that.

Kirsten Oates: A very sensitive person.

Jim Finley: Very sensitive, very observant, very clear.

Kirsten Oates: And very embodied.

Jim Finley: Very embodied, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: She's speaking out of her own deep embodied experience.

Jim Finley: She is. And notice what she's really doing is she's mentoring us on how to be the same way, see?

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Because if we turn to her as our teacher, see, she's mentoring us on how to be an embodied, clear-minded, sensitive, nuanced, patient, like that, all these qualities in transformation. Yeah. And reading her, like she starts to draw it out of you, like it's more than just an intellectual experience when you read her.

Jim Finley: It really is. And you can also see that learning to read the mystics, we can learn to live our life because we get this feeling that we're skimming over the depths of our own life. We're suffering from depth deprivation. And it's all the more regrettable because oneness with us is hidden in the depths over which we're skimming. We were looking at that in Merton.

Jim Finley: So, likewise, if we skim read Teresa, it's a metaphor that we're skimming over our own life. The pedagogy is we can't read her unless we slow way down to join her sentence by sentence. So, the very fact she speaks from a certain intimate level that requires we slow down, the slowing down to reader becomes a prayer, becomes a Lectio prayer, and then we kind of soak it in, and walk with it, and make it our own and, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Perfect segue into the last point I was going to make about the second dwelling where she says little by little, you will be able to practice prayer for longer periods undisturbed. Is that what she's getting at?

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. Blaise Pascal has this thing about the troubles of the world can reduce to the fact we have a very hard time sitting alone in a room in silence. A lot of the problems of the whole world can be understood as that. So, where at first maybe just to meditate or sit still for ten minutes, we begin to get antsy, we realize as we stay with it in ten minutes, we're just getting started because we're getting acclimated to these more subtle states and sensitivities, and we discover it's kind of a new home base for us.

And we could discover also, then, these mansion states, although they have their focal point in prayer, they get habituated through the whole day. Throughout the whole day, we realize we're recognizing things we didn't recognize before. We're responding in a way we couldn't respond before. And we realize that we're changing.

Kirsten Oates: And similarly, the prayer, we can last longer in prayer, we can last longer in a prayerful manner reading Teresa, like, we can hold the sentence longer in ourselves and let it work on

us for longer and—

Jim Finley: Exactly. So, everyone's personal, how they would do this in terms of journaling it or sitting with it, but you could realize you could, say, slowly read her paragraph by paragraph and write it out by hand, outline it, sit with it, and you realize an hour later, two paragraphs later, you walk away grateful, you know, like it's taking soundings, and we've kind of learned to meet her.

So, we're reading her in the kind of consistency with which she's writing because that's how she's writing to us, and we join the teacher. And we're kind of in an attunement with that, and we're in one accord with her, which is a gift to realize that's happening. Yeah. See, that's where I think these sessions might be helpful to people because, somehow, the spoken word—like Tami Simon, the oral tradition—

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So, somehow the spoken word can somehow convey this, that can help us move into the text being able to hear her voice in the text because we heard her voice as I speak, or they listen to you and I speaking, and they can kind of say it back, or articulate it, and then they can realize she's talking to us that way. That would be helpful, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So, moving into mansion three, what happens? How does the door open to mansion three?

Jim Finley: In the same way, too, what happens is we just keep working with this process. It reaches a tipping point, like critical mass, and we realize we start stabilizing in psychological spiritual maturity. But then we realize there's a new round of faults and shortcomings to work on.

Kirsten Oates: Right? [laughter]

Jim Finley: And she said, the light bulb inside, which is we welcome it because whatever it is that's hindering us from being consummated in love, we want to know about it. We want to know about it.

Jim Finley: And so, she starts listing these things that we may notice that we get a little concerned that a certain person seems to be getting holier than we are.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, yeah.

Jim Finley: Or we get impatient with our self, or we start comparing our self to others, they don't realize how holy we are. We can literally watch our self engaging in these patterns. And, also, wanting spiritual favors and not realizing still, we shouldn't be asking for these favors, we should be asking for the grace of God to sustain us and transform us and to be willing to join Christ in suffering for Christ's sake for the good of the world, and to walk our walk, and live our life, and all that.

But she says the real critical issue in the third mansion, which leads to the fourth, that reason has not yet been conquered by love. It's entirely too reasonable. You have all your T's crossed, your I's are dotted, you have a nice spiritual library. You're kind of getting the hang of it. Or, people in the third mansion, they do go sailing, but they're always careful to keep the shore

in view. You always want to be able to circle back, make another journal entry, where you can clarify it in terms of your understanding of your transformation.

So, she says, God starts to heal all this in the quiet of the fourth mansion. See, this is where it starts tipping over, but the bridge is that subtle point of sensing it's too confining, like there's something my heart's longing for that isn't found in my repertoire of internalized virtues, and so forth. Yeah, that noise!

Kirsten Oates: It's a leaf blower.

Jim Finley: No, this is good. This is contemplative life in the midst of the world.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: See, so what if I listen to that, and you and I both would get really angry? Who's that bastard outside my window? Would you shut up? Can't you see we're having a mystical talk in here? Why do I have to put up with this crap? Oh, I'm sorry. We're trying to study the Interior Castle of Teresa. [laughter]

By the way, the balance would be, if we would avoid Tuesdays and Fridays, we keep acclimating ourselves through a learning curve. And so, we have to be grounded in concreteness of reality, but at the same time accepting the givens of reality as a place we're invited to learn these things. And right now, we're invited to learn it with a noisy blower outside the window. [laughter] That's the point in a way, maybe.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. Well, amazingly, even amongst the noise of the leaf blower, the wisdom and mystery are still coming through.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's very interesting in a later passage, I think it's the third, one of the later mansions, she even says, but the noise in my head is spinning. And she says it's been a while. I'm so busy because the reform was going on, she was political. And she says, it's been a long time since I've been able to write more in the Interior Castle, and I'm so busy, I don't even have time to look back and see what I wrote last.

And so, there she was herself caught up with illness, pain, being like this. So, we're not exempt from any of this, we're to find that God transformed us in the midst of this, which is at the heart of her message, really, I think. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, would it be fair to say that in mansion two, we are starting to see ourselves as limited human beings, like we start to see our limits, but it's hard for us to acknowledge limits? We don't like to see them. And then in mansion three, we're more comfortable with having limits. We're looking for them a little bit more open heartedly where we're more open to ourselves?

Jim Finley: I would think so. It isn't that we have limits, but we're disheartened by the tenacity of the limits. I think that's really true. And we need to work on those limits insofar as it's reactivity, anger, withholding, we need to do our work, grounded in a peace of God sustaining us and transforming us as we work through these things in God's good time as we work, there is really that.

And so, I think what happens in the third mansion, there's more maturity around all of that. One, through our ongoing effort through the first and second mansions, we really have. We can see compared to where we used to be. We can really see that changes are happening in our life. There's that, but we've also learned our lessons about how God is present in our life as we are and present in other people around us. But then at the same time, we see these ongoing layers of comparisons and just, we see more subtle, refined layers that are ultimately going to be resolved in the fourth through this love.

Kirsten Oates: And does that build our humility? Is that part of how humility is being built in the third mansion, being able to see these parts of ourselves?

Jim Finley: Yeah, I think it is. One, I think in the third mansion, we learn to be grateful to God for where we've come to this point, because this gets translated into ministry, or into service, or how we treat the people we live with, or how we treat ourselves. The world's better off because we're a third Mansion person in it, see, and whether there would be more third mansion people in the world is true. And then at the same time, we see these unresolved things in us. We're learning our lesson. See, we don't give it as much authority, but we're still caught by them. We're still snagged by them. So, the experiential self-knowledge is one in which we kind of like this, but we don't yet see that it isn't going to be resolved by trying harder because no matter how refined you get, it's still finite. See?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Otherwise, it'd be kind of a perfectionism. And so, we're trying to find a love to liberate us from having the final say in our ability to resolve this on our terms, so it can be resolved on God's terms through love, through love, really.

Kirsten Oates: On page 81, she says, "Perfection isn't about consolation. It's about loving. We are rewarded by doing whatever we do with righteousness and love."

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. In another translation she says that God doesn't look for the greatness of what we do, God looks for how great our love is in everything that we do. And that's that new judgment, see, that's that new set of internalized reference points that's gracing our life this way.

Kirsten Oates: She also talks about the importance of community in mansion three. I think she talks about finding at least one person, so even if you are not part of a formal spiritual community, it would be great if you had someone to go to who would make sure you were not following your own will in anything.

Jim Finley: Yes. Sometimes, as I say to people in my talks, anyone who is really hoping to find someone to help give them realistic feedback about what they are really like should get married. [laughter] When you get married, the honesty of it, we sift each other like wheat. But sometimes, too, you look for a friend with whom you give the gift of being mutually real with each other. The friend is the one with whom we can self-disclose the troubling thing. And the friend is the person who we know doesn't in any way threaten the high regard they have for us and at the same time, they give us honest feedback and to be honest with you. I think part of the problem is like this.

And sometimes we're lucky to find somebody with whom we can return the favor, we help each other. Sometimes you're with somebody who's further down the road than you are. And I think this is what we would typically think of as spiritual direction, in these first three mansions, spiritual consult, see? And so, we would look for someone, and at the psychological level, maybe the therapist.

And so, you're looking for somebody who mentors you or guides you in experiential self-knowledge, honesty, your growing edges, attainments. Then you realize that maybe you're with somebody and you're being asked to return the favor to them. But then we were to hand this on and be there for and with each other. And we realize what makes the world tricky is we're the ones that are often holding each other back and pushing each other down.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: So, we're trying to roll it over to form community and this faith community is the faith community, ideally. Say, the faith community of the church, or any faith community, should be a community that's a gathering together of helpful people who help each other precisely along these lines, ideally speaking. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Ideally speaking, but it's really hard to find people that are trustworthy, but we can't see our own faults a lot of the time so it's—

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's delicate. Say, we're on this path and there may be people with whom we couldn't talk openly about this, that would know what we're talking about, but we do know they're a good person, and they're our friend, or they care about us; and, therefore, we can bring it to that level with them, which is real and it's important.

And then sometimes we find people with whom we can discuss these levels, they're not as easy to find. But this is what centering prayer groups are about. This is what deep Bible study is about. This is what prayer gathering is about that, ideally, it's the kinship, kindred spirits, who gather together to find exactly this kind of camaraderie, that you're not alone in this because you're just with this person who's on this path with you.

And I also think we might say that's the grace of like monastery in cyberspace, or these talks, that each person listening to this is not alone because there are many people all over who are listening to this. And even though we don't see each other physically, we're all woven into each other in a kind of a collective feeling of belonging, or recognition, or like that, which is the gift of it, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That's it. I know we've really felt the gift of that, Jim, reading the emails and things like that. Yeah, very real.

Jim Finley: They are very real. Really, yes. That's where it's at really.

Kirsten Oates: One last thing on mansion three, she talks about periods of aridity. What does she mean by that?

Jim Finley: There's a word in this acedia, or the noonday devil. And what aridity is, let's say you're living this way, trying to, and you go to your place of prayer, your prayer is your rendezvous with

God, and at this point in the third mansion it's still Lectio Divina—discursive, reflective meditation; prayer of the heart—you're praying, "Help me with this." And in that whole process, there's a sense of solace, or a sense of inner warmth, or a felt sense of God's presence, that God's there and hears you, is present to you. And when you open the Scriptures and read, you can feel God's voice speaking to you through the Scriptures. There's that.

What aridity is, you go for your daily rendezvous, and you open the Scriptures, and light your candle, whatever. You're getting all set, and God doesn't show up for the meeting. God doesn't show up for the meeting. The idea that the well goes dry. And so, aridity is then this art of discernment. Sometimes what's going on is something going on in our life, where Jesus says, "Before you bring your gift to the altar, put down your gift, make amends with your brother, and the prayer will go better."

So, sometimes we need to look at what's going on because prayer is kind of a litmus test of our heart. But we check it out, and we say I don't think that's it, really. And I think I have to look closer to what it is. And so, what she's saying is sometimes it's stress, and you say no wonder the well went dry. I'm going through a lot right now. I need to give myself a break here, back off a little bit and come back and kind of see. We need to kind of discern and go with it.

But also, and this is closer to John of the Cross on the subject of aridity, that what could be through aridity is God's weaning us off being overly dependent on our ability to feel the presence of God because the felt sense of the presence of God, while a gift, it's finite. And so, what God does is quietly take away the ability to experience it. So, we kind of like test the spirits like this. And so, that itself is its own discernment thing, like what's going on here? What do I need to look at? What do I need to accept? What do I need to do? I need to ask God to help me. How can I be present in this? Where am I at with this? And that's its own thing.

And as a therapist, by the way, this also correlates very highly with depression, with anxiety, with being retraumatized. Do you know what I mean? It's just that things come up, and it floods the field of this prayer, which is very delicate when you look at it. And the intensity of this "upsurgence" of these things keeps clouding over this delicate thing so we can know it's there. And so, we get help. We do what we need to do to kind of create a clearing again where we can get reinstated in this.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I know I've had experiences when I've had to reflect back on one of my patterns and where it came from, and the origins of it, and things I haven't contemplated in my life. And often the realization of hurts I've taken in and haven't processed can just lead to this overwhelming sense of not being grounded anywhere.

Jim Finley: Yes. And other than that, this is close to therapy also. I think sometimes when we're actually going through something that's too much to bear, we dissociate it off because we can't handle facing it consciously. And then what happens later on when we're on higher ground, we give ourselves permission to admit how painful it was. And in remembering it at the feeling level, it can well up again, and you can be retraumatized by unprocessed, internalized-- And, yeah, so how do you keep approaching it gently, touching the edges of it, and kind of work it through and that can really happen. It happens quite a lot, actually, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for articulating that so beautifully. I really resonate. That's been an ongoing part of my experience again and again, not just a one-off but as you go deeper.

Jim Finley: By the way with Teresa, let's say if everyone listening to all this, all the people listening to this, if we could all sit in a great big, huge circle, and see each other, and we go around the circle with show and tell, you'd realize it's like being at a recovery meeting, like a meeting for recovering would-be mystics, and all this would come out.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's the power of group therapy. You realize you're not alone in these patterns, and we're actually much more alike, but we hide it, see? We try to pretend. In AA, we say, "Don't compare your insides to other people's outsides." And so, we realize we're all walking around doing some posing and posturing, doing something similar, but we need that. But at another level, we take it too far, and we realize how can I learn not to do that so much.

There's a lovely story by Eugene O'Neill, the playwright, and he says this couple is starting to have this intimate relationship, and he said, "You know you need to know something about me. I'm wearing a mask." And she says, "Really?" He said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, take it off." He said, "I can't take it off. If I took the mask off, you'd leave me." She said, "But if you don't take the mask off, we're not having a real relationship." So, in a moment of existential risk, he lowers the mask, she sees his true face and leaves him. He puts the mask back on, she comes back. There are certain people that make that kind of deal with each other, make the kind of deal with each other, but the price paid for the half-lived life is bitter.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And how can I learn to be more real and take the mask off with myself to set boundaries to be safer, to learn how to take it off with other people and know when I need the mask, but I have the freedom not to wear it all the time, that's another big layer of looking at this, really.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. Jim, you're not going to do a Lectio on mansion three, can you tell us why?

Jim Finley: Well, simply because in this series, it's not meant to be an in-depth study. In other words, when I would do this with my sitting group at St. Monica's, I would give a half-hour talk like this. We would do an hour of sitting and walking meditation. But I would spend a year on a mystic. And so, the idea here is not to spend a year. To do justice to Teresa, the online course goes closer, it moves in another layer closer. This is to take soundings of her, to sit with and walk with, and as we keep moving through the mystics, each listener can find out for himself or herself which mystic most resonates with them.

So, on their own, and other sources we'll be providing where they can go to pursue that. So, that's really why. So, really, the third mansion is a kind of the maturation process of the second mansion. It's a kind of a stabilization, and with this kind of refined, subtle sense of something missing. And one commentator once, Mary Frohlich, she says, "I think it's true. You can tell she's in a way in a hurry to get to the fourth mansion." Because that's what she wants because she's already dealt with these at length elsewhere.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: I'm not in a hurry because they don't matter—

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: --but the purpose of this book, which is the last book I'm going to write before I die, it's important that we move into these mystical states because I realize it's so hard to find guidance in them, so hard to find someone to talk about them with." And so, that's why I'm moving on, too, I think, enough said.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, kind of following her pace around.

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Well, it's been incredibly helpful and valuable to spend these two question-and-response sessions on mansions one, two, and three. So, thank you so much. I do have one last question. I remember when I was first learning Teresa's Interior Castle from you, Jim, just having the sense that it's going to be helpful for me to never lose sight of what happens in mansion one, two and three because it feels like an ongoing process. And so, how to hold the humility of that ongoing refinement.

Jim Finley: That's a good point to end on. Ken Wilber has this idea of include and transcend; include and transcend.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: So, it isn't as if, and coming to the third mansion, there still isn't third mansion layers of our self that are always there. And under stress, we regress.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And we can tumble backwards into the first mansion, get our bearings, realize what happened, and little by little, it happens less and less and less and less and less and less, but it's always there, lest we forget. See? It's our teacher.

Likewise, the second mansion, we move into the third lest we forget the tenacity of these things. And then ironically, too, in the heights of mystical union, it's a heightened sensitivity to the holiness of first mansion people who have no idea how holy they are in God's eyes. And our heart goes out to people who don't even know yet they have a soul, infinitely loved by God, as precious human beings that are so lost.

So, actually, it heightens, which I think is the way Christ walked the streets and saw everybody that he saw walking the streets of this world. See, so, really it should have that effect of how present we are to the real world and the people in it trying their best to get through another day.

Kirsten Oates: Well, something beautiful to hope for.

Jim Finley: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kirsten Oates: And, Jim, thank you for your time today. This has been a real gift.

Jim Finley: Thank you, yes. I'm glad we're doing this.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. Please consider rating it, writing a review or sharing it with a friend who might be interested in learning and practicing with this online community. To learn more about the work of James Finley, please visit jamesfinley.org. We'll see you again soon.