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- *What to expect from prayer*
- *The use of imaging prayer*
- *Offering selfless prayer*
- *How to organize the messages*

God is a part of your group this evening. We certainly see God's presence, and we trust that each of you feels it through peace. The peace which you can experience is unfortunately never long-lasting, but it can serve as a kind of haven. It is a place to come back to. When you feel inner turmoil or conflict, worry or anger, you can remember that it is possible to quiet down and draw deeply the refreshment of peace. Although you may not always experience it, it is always available.

Your discussion tonight was in large part the result of our efforts to help you focus in on matters of significance and timeliness for each of you. So often we return to the subject of prayer, for it is perhaps the most discussed and least understood aspect of spiritual activity on the human plane of life. Human beings grope for some understanding of this dimension of reality. The efforts expended by countless thoughtful people are nevertheless inadequate to fully grasp the potential, yes even the power, of prayer. You have all spoken of prayer, you have read about prayer, you have heard others speak about prayer from the time of your childhood. And yet despite all of that experience, your association with prayer can be described only in terms of your experience with it. No matter or amount of instruction will have much impact. Prayer must be experienced to be believed.

Human beings tend to relate to what is concrete and to be distanced from what is theoretical. Much of our function in your lives is to help you become aware that prayer is very concrete. There is nothing theoretical about it. It is a very natural function. The benefits that flow from prayer are equally natural and in time, visible. You can experience the benefit of prayer. It isn't just a bottle with a message contained within set upon the sea to drift. It has direction, purpose, results, and those results are concrete. The difficulty which you have in dealing with those results is that you expect certain results, and when those expectations in specific terms are not met, you are often drawn to the conclusion that the prayers are not answered. But we urge you to recognize that the prayers are indeed answered and challenge you to discover those answers, to seek elsewhere to find another means of God's response.

Our last message with you described the nature of some of those responses—an increased sense of peace, of acceptance, etc. It is far too seldom that prayers are offered for such means, such ends. It is more normal to pray for the most immediate kind of response. As a child, one can pray for specific gifts, as was mentioned, because those gifts are concrete in their evidence. They are immediately recognizable. As you

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mature, the goal of what you pray for becomes less immediate, and the subject of those prayers becomes significantly deeper.

We urge you, in your prayers, to seek a means of recognizing God's response and to pray, if prayer is what is needed, for a result which is appropriate. Healing is always appropriate, but healing takes many forms. Peace is also appropriate, but peace takes many forms. For some, peace is the relinquishing of anger, competitiveness, or bitterness. It could be the elimination of envy, self-pity, or impatience. Peace takes many forms. One can pray for love, but one must also recognize that the realization of love takes many forms. It may be in acceptance of another. It may often be in acceptance of one's self. When you pray for peace to surround another, be willing to accept that such peace may come in a form not readily recognizable by you. One can always surround another with peace.

The use of imaging is extremely effective because it removes the formality too often associated with prayer. Imagining is a perfect example of what you can do for another without really making a "prayer" in some verbal manner on behalf of another. You are really recognizing God's presence through that imaging, and as we have said, that is the greatest benefit of prayer and its highest purpose.

When you pray, it is most effective when you yourself are at peace. When you are upset or distraught, it is difficult to remove self from prayer, even when you pray for another, because one is tempted to pray for what one wishes on behalf of another. When you pray for the peace of another, you are really being removed from the subject of that prayer, because you do not necessarily receive a direct benefit by the achievement of another's peace. When you pray for someone to be completely healed, you are often praying, in a sense, not to be separated from that person, and are thereby in part praying for yourself. We suggest, therefore, you seek ways of offering selfless prayer, selfless imaging, a selfless surrounding of another. The ability to exercise such prayer is greatly enhanced when you are at peace within.

The family of a mine worker in South Africa who is trapped deep beneath the earth is surrounded by such intense anxiety that it is only possible to pray that such mine worker be rescued alive. The family is really expressing their anxiety over being separated from the mine worker. It is not that this is a bad prayer, for there are no good prayers or bad prayers. But for that family who finally receives word that their loved one will not be rescued alive, there is a great sense that somehow God has abandoned them and their loved one. And whatever counseling they may receive from a minister or another, their sense of prayer and what it can achieve will not be enhanced, for their response to prayer is only met through their experience.

We give this example, not because it is an extreme case in theory, but because it has so recently occurred. As the family draws away from the immediacy of the tragedy, it is able, perhaps, to approach God through prayer—prayer directed toward achieving a peace and acceptance of what has happened. Perhaps that family in the future may

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pray for the continued growth and development of the loved one who was lost. Although they can not necessarily know whether such growth in the other has taken place, they will sense that somehow in their tragedy God was indeed present, that they were not abandoned and that their loved one was not abandoned.

These are difficult lessons to learn. They are difficult for those families still grieving, but they are also difficult for each of you as you search for ways of helping others. How best can you help them? How can you ease their lives? How can you sensitize them to God's presence? As was stated several times tonight, it is sometimes difficult to know what to pray. We hope that you will think of prayer as being supportive, as being based on love and peace. As a result, your efforts to bring God's presence into your own lives and the lives of others will be enhanced.

You wonder about how to handle all of the information which has been gathered over the years. We referred to this very briefly quite a while back—that you may find a time in the future when it would be appropriate to begin some kind of organized collection of material but that you would know when the time was right. We must say that we sense strongly your recognition that the time is at hand, and yet question what can be done, how can it be done, and in what direction you should proceed.

The project of compiling much that you have been blessed to learn is much like writing a dissertation. It is really never finished, for there is more to be learned, more to be explored, and we see your joint search continuing in the years ahead. But we also feel that over the past years you have received so much from which you can proceed.

It is best to keep a specific focus for each project, to seek out topics—specific topics—and then explore what has been said about a topic, and from that reduce the material to a manageable proportion. It is an enormous project and it cannot be done quickly, but it is right to proceed. The direction, the choice of topics, the means for doing all of this will fall into place, and we see such an effort being successful as an additional voice to the choir of many voices which explain the realm of God and the question of spiritual growth. Your guides will help with this project. Indeed, every step should be taken with prayer for peace, with a prayer for the avoidance of panic or indecision.

But in the end whatever is put together will still remain incomplete. Your search for truth will never be fully complete. What will be imparted to you will be offered according to your own collective and individual development. The more your growth becomes a part of your daily lives, the more you will learn. You must not be discouraged that you can never achieve a complete picture, for that is not God's will. God's desire is for your growth; it is not for ultimate goals. Your human life must be characterized by an expanded awareness, not total knowledge. No one has total knowledge of any field of endeavor. One only grows in depth of understanding, and so it is with spiritual matters.

You contribute to each other in your sharing and in your questioning. You contribute to each other even in your disagreements, for you are challenging one another to seek deeper understanding.

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You are the recipients of a great gift in the knowledge you are acquiring, but you are also the holders of a great responsibility, as we have so often said—the responsibility of applying what you know to be true. The application of faith is difficult when you are discouraged, but that is precisely when it is needed. When all goes well, there is less need or urgency for exercising faith. It is only when difficulty sets in that faith is called into play, and understandably, it is at that time that the exercise of such faith is the most difficult.

You have grown greatly in your understanding of one another and in your perception of spiritual reality. We pray for your strength to use your understanding at times when it is the most difficult. We pray for your peace in order to focus on the application of what you know to be true. We pray for the exercise of love in all its facets of your life. We pray for patience that each of you may have strength to accept where you are within your own life and career as being appropriate for you at this time.

Striving, of course, is a good trait to have. It is always important to reach. But when you strive, when you reach, be certain that you are reaching to God and not to your own self sense of fulfillment.

Our prayers for you are merely the reflections of God's presence and God's potential in your lives. You are blessed because of God's presence. When we offer our blessings to you, it is actually God's blessings through us to you.

Rejoice that each of you has much to be thankful for! Recognize God's presence daily in your lives and in the lives of those around you, and pray for those whom you sense to be somewhat distanced from God's light that they may be drawn closer. We pray that you may be drawn ever closer to God's light and bless you as you go about your activities.

Amen.