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- *Organized religion*
- *Grace, guidance and conscience*
- *How prayer is answered*

God surrounds all of you in this group with grace and loving care.

It is a time of great rejoicing for us to see you all gathered in a prayerful manner, turning your hearts toward God. To you, it seems as a kind of removal from the kind of worship which is so much a part of your lives. The differences which you experience in a group such as this can easily create distances between you and your experience of God through an organized worship.

The first forms of worship of humankind were motivated in many ways by the same impetus which draws you together now. You are, whether you wish to call it so or not, a little church. In a short time you have organized your gathering together in a particular manner which gives meaning to your experience. As humans began worshiping, the organization of that worship became an integral part of the whole. From the times of pagan religion to the present day, the need for organization remains strong.

We often hear criticism of the importance placed on the structure of worship at the expense of its content. Your criticism is well founded, but although it may occasionally lead to a sense of frustration in your search for the path to God, you are still empowered to overcome that frustration by centering your attention on the purpose of the religious experience in a corporate setting. All of you who experience the dissatisfaction of formalized worship must eventually bring your attention to the real purposes which unite you, just as your attentions are focused more on the content of these messages than on the physical surroundings, placement of chairs, or any other such accompaniments.

What God wishes us to share with you is vital for your lives, and you must value this content above other distractions or concerns. You are a little church as a group, and the experience which you share is the experience of the early church before it became such a dominant power in the world. By separating yourself from the activities of the church, you are removing yourself from the potential for growth which is the sole reason for the church's existence. When we speak of your resistance to a church full of doctrine, we refer to you not individually but as a group who are in search of a more meaningful life. The answers are not found by withdrawing from the search. A scientist investigating the properties of matter must explore all available avenues of approach. The relinquishing of even one possibility may jeopardize the final result. So it is in the search for God.

As you gather in a group, you have a common purpose, but you approach this experience from many different points. Despite the differences in each of your

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perspectives, you seek a common goal. This principle applies to a group of two or four or four hundred. We suggest therefore, that you continue to seek out the real meanings and objectives in corporate worship by eliminating those aspects of the experience from your consciousness which serve to detract or cloud your perception of God. As we have said often before, each of you has the capacity to receive God's guidance. It is not given freely. You must first ask for it. Only God's grace is given without request. That is the nature of grace.

All of you have a responsibility to learn to recognize God's grace in your lives. This is not an easy task because it generally requires hindsight. By that we mean that it is not readily noticeable when God bestows grace on your lives. You must view your lives with perspective. We have the capacity to view forward and backwards. You have the ability to view your lives only in retrospect. By studying the nature of your lives as individuals, the events which have happened, the opportunities which have been made available, you begin to sense God's grace in your lives. This takes conscious effort for each of you, and it is an activity which too few bother to engage in.

It is natural for mortals to spend most of their consciousness attending to the present and worrying about the future. The guidance which each of you is capable of receiving is perceived in the present. It may also be perceived in retrospect, but you have the ability, when you open yourselves to God, to know the right thing to do. You frequently call it your conscience. Your conscience says you must do this and not that. No hindsight is required for such sensitivity, only the willingness to act.

Your conscience as you call it, God's guidance as we call it, is most freely felt when you can separate yourselves from the temptations of self-service and self-need. The tendency of all toward selfishness is not God's guidance. It is not your conscience speaking to you. When you feel that the needs of the self are present, and you ask God for guidance in your decisions and actions, remove the self and concentrate on your conscience. That is the voice of God. That is God's guidance.

This is what happens as you receive these messages. You are removing your self and responding to your conscience. We speak to you through your conscience. Yes, each of you has the capacity to receive God's guidance, but you must first open yourselves and remove the selfishness which surrounds so much of what you think and speak and do.

Your conscience is never wrong. There is a difference between following your conscience and responding to a hunch. The compelling nature of God's voice in each of you is infinitely stronger than a hunch. As each of you approaches major decisions in your lives, wait until you have opened yourselves to that voice which speaks so strongly within you. In matters of living a life directed by God, there are no hunches, only certainties which you can choose to follow or ignore. The sense of rightness or direction which you seek by being still and listening to God will not always come to you

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immediately. What delay there is is not because God is delaying, but because something stands in the way between you and what God wants.

You must have faith that God answers your prayers. God's response is immediate. It is your perception of that response which takes time. God does not place requests in a filing system with the intention of answering your prayers at a future time. God's response is more immediate even than the time needed for your request. We don't suggest that the answer to prayer is immediate gratification, for often what you pray for has an essential element in it which requires that the answer span a period of time.

If you pray to receive the power of tolerance of others, you will be granted immediately the potential strength to achieve that tolerance. The strength for tolerance was the essential element of that prayer. The tolerance itself was the end product. It is the end product which often takes time to unfold. Herein lies the source of so much doubt in your hearts about the power of prayer. When you pray for tolerance, you want that tolerance now, or at least in the foreseeable future, but you see, when you are given the potential for achieving tolerance, your prayer has already been answered. It is up to you, it is your choice, whether you wish to work toward the end result or to give up in impatience. If it takes you twenty years to learn real tolerance for others, your prayer has been answered. You were given the capacity, and you chose to act on it. If you never prayed for tolerance, you would not have received it, but the realization of that prayer took many years.

Keep in mind always that as you pray, you may be unaware of the essential element of that prayer. What you may be seeking is the end result. The realization of prayers, therefore, may take a lifetime or an instant. When you pray for guidance in making a decision, you are opening yourselves to God's direction. It may be only after many years that you receive the confirmation of the rightness of that decision. Your recognition of the rightness of that decision is an element of grace in itself and it is achieved in hindsight.

There is much in this message that God has given to you that will need considerable study. Though the terms are plain, the concepts are complex and you should earnestly study the implications which have been passed on to you. Your growing awareness of God's presence in your life now, and in retrospect through an awareness of God's grace, and in the future through faith, will support the journey of your souls as they come closer to God.

We extend to you all God's blessings, grace, peace and love.

Amen.