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- *The nature of God*
- *Correcting behavior*
- *See challenges as opportunities for growth*

God rejoices at your gathering together at this time. Yes, God can rejoice. God is not a power without feeling. Too often humans believe that God may be love, but is that the only emotion that is capable of being felt by God? If God can feel love, God can feel joy. God can also feel sorrow. It is common to attempt to define God in human terms, for that is the only way that you can grasp some of God's character.

As you certainly know, God is not actually human, male or female. God is not identified as a kind of genus or species, but God is a presence whose characteristics are shared to a greater or lesser extent among all people. It is not so important to attribute to God human emotions but rather to attribute to humankind godly qualities. That is the connection of which we speak. You feel love because God is love. You feel the benefits of joy, elation, optimism, energy, enthusiasm because these are all characteristics of God that affirm the value of life and of all who share life. You experience love because love is learned. You experience joy because joy is learned, but in experiencing these emotions, you also express them. You are not just the receiver—you are the giver of these. It is in the giving of these affirming attributes that you are really reflecting the God that lies within.

You may wish to carry the analogy between God and human emotion further and wonder understandably whether negative emotions also come from God because they belong to God. God does not represent hatred or prejudice or jealousy, but God provides life that has within it those characteristics. They are not from God, but they emanate from life which is a gift from God. They belong to that life and therefore are a part of the total creation of God.

The characteristics of God are never negative. Many years ago it was perceived that whatever happened that created pain or suffering was merely the anger of God manifest in human life, but God is not an angry God. God's presence is always patient and enduring.

If you disapprove of the actions of another, the expression of anger seldom changes those actions. It may indeed make them more intense. You do not change another, therefore, by being angry. Change is brought about by compassion, through listening, through support, through prayer.

A child who is angry and whose actions arise out of that anger is not corrected by being punished. The child is only made more angry. It has taken a long time for humankind to accept this and to recognize its truth. It does not mean that there is no responsibility or accountability for negative behavior. It merely means that reaction to that negative behavior must not in itself be negative.

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When a patient is ill, no cure is provided when the physician becomes angry. You go to a doctor to be healed, not to be corrected in a punitive sense. The healing takes place because you are willing to be healed.

Correction in society occurs when those who are disruptive wish to be transformed. Your responsibility as people who wish to reflect the reality of God is to provide an environment in your community, in your country, in your families that encourages change toward the direction of God's presence—godly behavior, if you will.

There is much talk at this time about crime, about hate, the way people respond when they feel hatred. The bearing of arms due to hate is not an appropriate response, for it does not eliminate the hate—it spreads it. God's characteristics, if you wish to so label them, obviously are not in the company of those who spread hate by force. The development of humankind toward a more spiritual focus takes an eternity, but the development nevertheless is moving forward. There will always be acts of aggression and hate, negative activities, in all societies, for that is indeed a part of what it means to live as a human being in that society. But working with negativism in society, you can make a noticeable difference in the power of God's presence by reflecting upon your own perceptions of how God would respond to a situation.

If you are opposed to the actions of a neighbor, you can express that opposition lovingly. You can express that opposition with patience. You can express your disapproval of the action, yet acknowledge the importance of the actor. By reaffirming the value, you are strengthening the bond that connects that person to his soul, thereby improving and deepening the meaningful content of that individual's life. In so doing, you are eliminating an encountered difficulty.

It is well known that it takes two to have an argument. If one is angered and expresses that anger, and the other remains quiet and listens not to what's being said but to what is being meant, there is no argument. One has expressed frustrations or anger; the other has listened and will understand the source of that anger more clearly than by argument, by challenging or refuting.

The personality of God is centered upon the affirmation of life and we imply in the term "life" all that has been created, whether or not it is breathing. Everything that has been created is life—minerals, animals, vegetables. All that you are aware of is life. It is for you to affirm that Life with a capital L, to affirm its value and to affirm your placement within that view.

You have been given life to live. You have been given life to be challenged, to grow through those challenges, to make mistakes, to recognize those mistakes, to try and correct them and fail, and try again and fail, and try again until you succeed. What is important is the effort, the trying, so to say. It is the way you respond to the challenges in life that is of prime importance. If you are given a challenge and immediately overcome it, you are no stronger. You have merely changed your ways. But if you are given a challenge that you are not immediately able to manage, but you

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try in your response to overcome, it is often the effort that provides the real source for growth.

So many times we have underscored the importance of growth—no hurry, no time limit, just the growth. Be willing to accept that there are challenges that you face that will not immediately be overcome. That is not failure. You don't fail life. You grow with it. No one really fails. You may try to meet a problem and in the process lose everything. You haven't failed because your response is not finished after the loss. The growth which is essential is what you do after you have lost.

Welcome those opportunities when you are less than successful in your own eyes. Don't look upon setbacks as failures. Consider them to be opportunities for growth. It is in the meeting of those challenges that the growth takes place, not just in the overcoming.

Life is full of these challenges. They may be problems of health, they may be problems of the spirit, of the mind, whatever. Try not to set for yourselves a specific, identifiable yardstick that measures that your growth has been achieved. Allow yourselves to evolve through the challenges that you encounter, but don't try to measure them. Don't try to evaluate your evolution. That is vain and ultimately serves no purpose.

It is the same as when you pray for another and you try to help another. Don't look for concrete evidence that your prayers, your efforts have born fruit. That's not important. The evidence is immaterial. All that's essential is that you prayed, that you tried. Hang onto your efforts and be willing to let go of a recognition or the need for a recognition of success. Your lives will then be more full and you will then be less prone to feelings of disappointment or frustration or discouragement. You live to live. You live to respond. You live to try. You live to reach out and help. That's what's important in your lives.

From our side we see your lives evolving. We do not look upon your lives from a high perch, clutching a checklist of sorts and acknowledging "this has been completed, this has been completed, and that has been completed." That is unimportant. Certainly it is important to have goals in your life because such goals give your life direction. We are only urging that you de-emphasize the importance of concrete evidence that those goals have been reached. Those goals are only there to provide a sense of balance, of perspective, of knowing what is more important and what is less important.

Accept your lives as they are. That does not mean to do nothing, but it does mean to accept fully and internally that where you are is where you should be. Be willing to reach beyond your grasp toward a view of a godly life. Let that be the measure of where you are headed, and turn your face away from any means that may be ahead of measuring the amount of progress, for such measurements only lead to discouragement or pride, and neither of those emotions is godly. Therefore avoid a view

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of life that provides these rewards, for these rewards are empty and have no meaning in the ultimate development of your spiritual selves.

God is with each of you. Your view of God's presence widens. Do not be concerned about whether that view is complete or not, only that you have a view and you act upon that view. Rejoice when the view is expanded as God rejoices, for that rejoicing is a reaffirmation of the value of your life and the life of all.

We bless each of you with God's warmth, God's loving compassion and endless love.

Amen.