



Unity Church of Christianity  
TEACH US TO PRAY  
MAY 16, 2010

### **Howard Caesar**

So let's begin today by knowing the fact that we are all students in this life. The analogy has often been used, or the metaphor, that we are in a school, we are learning, and that this is a curriculum that we are experiencing as we grow through life. So we are students in life and students of life. We are intended to learn about the truth, the spiritual truth, the spiritual principles and laws that exist and to learn to apply them to make a difference in our life. Additionally we are here to be deepening our relationship with our source which we call "Spirit." God goes by many names, "Creator," "All-knowing Mind," various names, and we like to use the word "Spirit" if at all possible. Nothing could be more important than that relationship with Spirit and deepening and connecting with it. That's the greatest learning that we can have. And Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom," and that was saying that's number 1, and that kingdom of heaven, that kingdom of God, is a state of consciousness. He said it's not a place. It is at hand, and it's within you. And so it's important to recognize that's where God lives is within you. We spend so much time talking about that, it's important that we grasp that.

So as students of life we are learning how to have a closer walk with thee. Very vital. Very important. In the midst of a life that is filled with form and materiality and physicality, it must be balanced with our relationship to the realm of the formless, the unseen; that's what Paul

referred to as the unseen that is housed within the seen. It's talking about the source that is Spirit, and scripture tells us that, "God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." All spiritual things are spiritually discerned. So the main goal of life is really to know Spirit, to experience Spirit, and to express Spirit; to know God, to experience God, and from that, to express God through you. The only way you are going to express God is by knowing and actually having a firsthand experience. And that's why it's so vital and so important that we lean on into that.

The disciples of Jesus were essentially students. Disciple comes from the word discipline. They were being disciplined into the spiritual laws and principles that Jesus was seeking to teach them, and they were in a learning process. They referred to him as "Rabbi" which is the word "teacher." He was definitely recognized as a teacher for them. It was so that they could do the works that he did. In fact, one of the things that Jesus said, found in John 14, "Very truly I tell you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do and even greater works than these." That is pretty powerful. What Jesus was saying is, "I'm here to teach you things so that you can repeat what it is that I'm doing," in terms of the utilization of the spiritual laws and principles that are universal; through all time and all space they are accessible. And I'm here to introduce you to a God that is as accessible to you as it is to me. It's a very powerful teaching, and this is what the disciples were seeking to learn and understand.

Nowhere is it documented that the disciples, these students of Jesus, ever requested that Jesus show them how to multiply the loaves and fishes or how to raise the dead or how to do various other miracles. That request is nowhere documented. But what is documented is one big, major request. And that request from the disciples was, "Teach us to pray." Teach us to pray. They understood the importance of prayer. They understood that Jesus' whole role in ministry was built on a relationship with the divine, and that he was talking about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, and that he said that it was at hand, and he said that it was within you, and therefore, that was the road one was to progress toward as a connection to this kingdom that is within; where the Spirit lives. So Jesus also demonstrated a prayer life to these disciples. They observed him, they saw him, and He prayed at every turn. Before any kind of a demonstration He always paused to acknowledge that power and that activity. The gospels talk about it throughout, that he had an inner life, and it was an inner life that he nurtured kind of quietly and even privately to some extent. He would retreat to the hills and to the mountains and go off by himself apart a while. And the disciples observed that, and they saw him return, and they realized that there was a glow about him, that there was a difference, that He was radiating this light and this presence and this peace and this calm and this assuredness of knowing the truth; all a result of having gone ye apart a while and connected with that presence and power, that one source, so that that clarity was brought forth, even all the more, as the teacher that He was.

Now Jesus was our counselor, we could say, while on earth. He was a voice for truth, He was the voice for God, and He said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." So it's talking about

oneness. He said, “The words that I speak are not of myself but the Father that dwelleth in me and he doeth the works.” So it’s not me folks, and even the words that I’m speaking I’m getting as a result of a connection through prayer, and I’m being told what to say and to share out of the clarity and the inspiration of the attunement and a onement with God, that I too have to go be apart a while to establish. So I can’t take the credit. The Father and I are one. And this was attained and maintained through prayer.

Now when He departed from the earth, He said that the Father, Father God, had provided us another counselor. And that this counselor would abide with us forever. And He referred to this and called it, “the spirit of truth.” All of this is found in the Gospel John chapter 14, you can read about it. But He referred to it as the spirit of truth that would be provided as our counselor. Some have referred to it in tradition as the Holy Spirit. But Jesus said, “The spirit of truth is something you cannot see.” He talked about that. You can’t see God. God is spirit. But He said that you can come to know him. “Because,” He said, “He dwells with you and shall be in you.” Very powerful stuff. You can’t see God, God’s spirit. It’s a feeling, it’s an experience. But you can come to know Him because He dwells with you and will be in you. And that’s why Paul referred to as the body, as the temple of God, the temple of the living God because Paul knew that the spirit of God dwells within us and that we go to the altar of our being when we become quiet and still and go to the silence within and connect with the divine presence. So the presence of God, most importantly, is within you, and the voice of truth lies within you. And we have simply covered over it in varying degrees, all of us, by virtue of life and its distractions and the things that we read into life and come to believe that are not necessarily at all true. But this idea of a voice of truth that speaks within is something that all of the masters and mystics and teachers through time have come to learn and seek attunement with. They have gone ye apart a while, the have recognized the importance of it. And even the poets and writers, many of them have come to know and write about them.

In fact, there’s a beautiful writing that Robert Browning, poet and writer, has shared that I love to return to in which he states this with clarity, he has to have been a man of prayer. He wrote, “Truth is within ourselves. It takes no rise from outward things. What e’er you may believe, there is an inmost center in us all where truth abides in fullness and to know rather consists in opening out a way whenst the imprisoned splendor may escape then in effecting entry for a light supposed to be without.” Do you understand? What he’s saying is that God is not out there, a light that’s going to penetrate you from external to internal; it comes from within. Key statements. “Truth is within ourselves,” he said. He said, “There is an inmost center in us all. And to know consists in opening out a way so that this imprisoned splendor may escape.” It’s like there is this splendor of knowing God that lives within us but it’s imprisoned. It’s imprisoned and we have to find a way to set it free and to connect with it. Now we may welcome the voice of spirit and the voice of wisdom and allow it to have its way and to fill our mind or we may not welcome that voice of spirit. But just the same, that voice of Spirit is there. We may not hear it and we may not hear it because we have not established a sense of receptivity. We

have not made it important. We have not sought to step into a sense of listening and looking for and being sensitive to those inner whisperings of the divine. And that's why it's important to get to a sacred space, to move into the quietness, to quiet down the mind. The mind is racing with so many things it is important to learn to quiet that down, and it's there that you come to experience the splendor that has been previously imprisoned.

The difference between an enlightened person and an unenlightened person is that an enlightened person has learned to practice the presence of God on a continual, regular basis. And the person who is in varying degrees of unenlightenment is practicing the absence of God. We practice the absence of God by being in fear and worry and doubt in all of these varying things. So one of the ways in which we practice the absence is also in that we lock onto ideas about God that are untrue. We conceive God often times. We have been taught ideas about God that are not accurate, misconceptions. And God can only be experienced to the degree that we have conceived and come to understand God. As our understanding broadens and expands then our experience has the opportunity to broaden and expand, if we apply what we have come to learn. So God can only be as big as we can be big in our own consciousness. If we conceive God as small and have a small consciousness in a sense that we're small in our understanding, we're small in our understanding of truth, we're small in our commitment and conviction to seeking to live it, then to the degree that we have given little to experience God, we will experience little. And if our God is little then we will experience little. But as we grow and expand and understand the truth of God and open up to that God becomes bigger and broader and that experience of God becomes all the more. And that's part of what our growth and unfoldment is about.

As children we were all taught prayer, and some of us were taught memorization of prayer. One of them that is fairly common, it's a fairly old prayer, I don't know how many are using it today but some of you will recognize it, it's the prayer that says, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." How many of you heard that prayer? (laughter) Look at that. Wow! Do you realize how negative that prayer is? (laughter) You are telling that child in the second line every time, "If I should die before I wake." It's about death and a concern about death. Point being that we start out with memorization and we start out with a small understanding and we begin to grow and evolve from that and grow out of it into deeper understandings, of course. There's one other prayer that kind of has a similar ring to it that is also fairly old, I guess. It goes back to church and church times, and it goes like this (maybe you've heard it), "Now I sit me down to sleep, the speaker's dull, the subject's deep. If he should stop before I wake, give me a poke, for goodness sake!" (laughter) I hope no one's praying that prayer here.

So the reasons we don't pray. The reasons people don't pray are things like they learn to fear God. And if you have learned to understand that God is an angry God and that God is a punishing God and that God has been portrayed like a disciplining parent who scolds and

punishes, then that will get in the way, and you will not fear, many person does not feel worthy of asking for God's help. There are many other more worthy people deserving of God's time and attention. And sometimes people think of it like that. Sometimes people think the only way that I can approach God is I first have to clean up my act, and they are forever cleaning up their act so they never get to go see God. They never feel like they have gotten themselves in order enough to be actually approaching God, and so they feel like their soul has been soiled in some way. So that is harbored. If any of that and other things like it stand in the way then we really don't understand God is love. God is love consistent, unending, never changing. "I have loved you with an everlasting love," it doesn't go away. Yes, we make mistakes. God is not a punishing God. As the course of miracles states and as we teach, we make mistakes and you have to take aim once again, you have to adjust, try again, do better. Mistakes call for correction, not for punishment. God is not about punishment. It is the laws of life that seem to punish us. There is the law of mind action, thoughts held in mind produce after their kind. As you sow in thought and in consciousness so do we create an experience that comes back. We have to have feedback in some way, shape, or form as to how we're doing in consciousness. And even there are things that come to us that we maybe didn't even create, but they're there, given to us to be able to move to states of consciousness that strengthen and rise above and beyond to demonstrate those spiritual muscles that we are learning. So it's not God that punishes, it's the law. The same way that if you fall off a cliff, it's the law of gravity that did it, it's not God. If you can't stay in alignment and harmony with the laws of gravity, you can't blame this on God. The highest law, of course, is love, and it is the highest vibration, and we are to let all of our thoughts and actions be coming from love. It indicates if we're coming from that vibration, that we are practicing the presence, because if you are practicing the presence you are really understanding and vibrating with the energies of love. Now if you are practicing the absence, probably you're experiencing fear. Fear is a low, low vibration. That will tell you that you're practicing the absence rather than the presence.

For some we can become uncomfortable with prayer or be uncomfortable with prayer because we've never gotten comfortable with it. We've really never been taught nor has it ever been familiar to us. So we have to begin to lean on into it, launch into it, make it a regular part of our lives, practice the presence and tune into it. As Paul said, "Pray without ceasing." It's basically just saying in moments throughout the day I just remember that I'm a spiritual being and God's spirit lives within me. That's all that a prayer needs to be. It lifts you up. You are proclaiming your identity as a spiritual being, an eternal being. You're identifying with the spirit within you beyond form. It's these things that are so important. We need to look at prayer as a privilege, and most of the time we don't. The reason sometimes I think we don't is that the door to prayer is always open; it's never closed. God never says you can't pray or here are the hours. (laughter) I believe that if prayer was only permitted, somehow there was a law of the universe that prayer was only available 1 hour per year that ultimately most people would look forward to that hour, unless they had, again, some belief around fear of God. But they would look forward to that time of immersing themselves in the energies and the presence of this harmony, this calm, this

peace, this joy, all of the attributes that are of God. How powerful that would be. But the door is always open, and it is a privilege, and it's always there for us to step into it. "Ask and it shall be given unto you." "Seek and ye shall find." "Knock and the door will be opened unto you." All we have to do is knock and knock on a regular basis. We have to want it. We have to want a closer walk with thee. It has to be important. So many other things in life pull us away that are important and the two have to be balanced together. We have to hunger and thirst as it's spoken of in the scriptures. Hunger and thirst for communion with our source, that from which we come, that from which we are intended to resonate with; to see it as a privilege, to see it as important, to have that desire.

You know the story about the boy that was watching a holy man on the banks of the river pray, and when he was done praying the little boy went out, the boy (I don't know how little he was, but it was a boy) went over to the holy man and said, "Can you teach me to pray and to know God?" And the holy man looked him up and down and then said, "Okay," and he took his hand and led him into the river. He took his head, and he dunked him in the water, and he held him down. The boy began to struggle and flap around trying to get up to get some air, and he held him down. Finally, he let him up, and the boy was gasping for air. When he finally got his breath he said, "What did you do that for?" And the holy man said, "I have just given you your first lesson." He said, "When you desire to pray and to know God as much as you wanted air to breath, then you will have begun to know God."

So it comes from a desire. It has to be important. Obviously, most of us do not exhibit that level of hungering and thirsting. But it's a good question to ask ourselves; where do we stand in our level of desire? Prayer is communion with God. There's communion that has the wafer and the wine and I honor and respect that ritual. But ultimately we must get to the place where there is no place where we cannot experience communion with God, because the truth is there isn't; there isn't any place you cannot walk through the door of your own being and know that God is there and just feel those energies and attune to it. It is the conduit that allows us to stay connected to the source. We have that free will to either keep that connection open or we allow it to get clogged, and it gets clogged with distractions of the world. Jesus said, "Be in the world but not of it." And he said that we were to "bring heaven to earth," which means to bring heaven and the energies of heaven on into the world. And he was saying that there is a way to leave the ways of the world, its fears, its lies, its illusions and confusions, and that is by immersing yourself in the truth. And the way you immerse yourself in the truth is through prayer. *A Course in Miracles* says, "We do not leave this world through death but through truth." It's an interesting thing. "We do not leave this world through death but through truth." We're here to rise above many of the ways of the world and step aside, rise above the problems and the ways we frame things and block and clog the movement of God in and through us. And we can experience this more of God, not by praying to a god that is outside of us, but praying in the recognition that we have a union with God. So it's not praying to God, it's praying from a oneness with God; the idea that God is within, that you are the temple the living God. It's not about begging or pleading or

beseeking. It's not about bargaining with God. It's not trying to change God's mind, trying to get him from a no to a yes. (laughter) It's about changing us. Prayer is about changing us. It's about getting us from a no, to life, to faith, to joy, to peace; from a no to a yes to these things and those dimensions of the truth. So it is praying from God as opposed to God.

Prayer is thought. Thoughts are things. So it's praying God thought, the mind of God. Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view." There are the facts, but then here is the truth, a higher point of view. Jesus said, "When you pray, enter into the inner chamber and shut the door, and go to your Father in secret. He who sees you in secret will reward you in secret." So why was He talking about shutting the door? Well, He was saying you have to close out the outer world, all the distractions, all the worries, the fears, the doubts, all the things that pull you in separation from. This is about the union, prayer is about union, uniting, communing. You can't do that when you've got 2 agendas going on at the same time. You're not to take with you, necessarily, the problem. If you are going to plant a garden, you don't take seeds that actually grow weeds along with seeds of what it is you want to grow and have them all jumbled together. You go to a place and you plant what you want to know, what you want to have, what you want to experience.

When the disciples asked, "Teach us to pray," Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer, and prior to telling the prayer his instructions included, "Go to this inner chamber, close the door." He said, "Do not pray to be seen like those on the street corner," and he said, "Do not use vain repetitions." He said, "Pray in this manner," which was like this, it wasn't to be the end all of all prayers, it was to be this way of praying. If you look at the Lord's Prayer, it's about a series of affirmations. "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever." Paraphrasing, another way of saying that would be, not that the Lord's Prayer as it is isn't adequate or sufficient, but it's saying similar to this even in a more affirmative way, "Our Father of the heavens within, your name is hallowed to me. Your kingdom is coming into my experience. Your will is being done in the seen as it is in the unseen. Your bread of inspiration comes to me daily. Your forgiveness is felt as I extend the same to others. You lead me not into temptation. You deliver me from error. You are the kingdom, you are the power, you are the glory forever." You see the declaration? Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given unto you." But also scripture says, "Thou shalt decree a thing and it shall be established unto you." It's about decreeing the truth. Sometimes instead of meekly going, "God, please help. Help my weakness. Help me be strong," what we need to say is, "God, you are my strength. You are my strength. I am one in the strength of the Lord." Instead of saying, "God, please heal me or prosper me," it's "God is healing me now. God is prospering me now." It's that kind of sense. God is wisdom, but I am wise. God is power, but I am powerful. God is love, and, therefore, I am able to be loving. God is abundance, and therefore, I am able to prosper. God is wholeness, and I am able to be healed. One must come to realize that

which I am seeking, I am. Getting there is being there. It is stepping into a state of beingness, the energies of beingness that you begin to realize what it is that you are seeking to experience. It is not a matter of getting from God, but becoming conscientiously aware of all that God is right where you are, here and now. As the Psalm said, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Charles Fillmore had an invocation, and I share it with you in closing. Charles Fillmore, our co-founder in Unity, it’s beautiful, he said and wrote, “I am now in the presence of pure being and immersed in the Holy Spirit of life, love, and wisdom. I acknowledge thy presence and thy power, oh blessed spirit. In thy divine wisdom, now erase my mortal limitations, and from thy pure substance of love, bring into manifestation my world according to thy perfect law.” Pray without ceasing. Be a light in the world. God bless you all.

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