

Jesus:
The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part X
"The Ladder of Prayer" (*The Song of Prayer*, S-1.II)

Let's skip now to the beginning of the next section and read just a little. This section, "**The Ladder of Prayer**," presents the image of the ladder that we have been using. The top of the ladder is God and Christ—what is above the purple line on the chart. Everything below it constitutes the ladder. The same image is used in the text, where it says the Holy Spirit will lead us up the ladder that separation has led us down (T-28.III.1:2). The meaning of the image is that we have fallen from Heaven and into the ego's world, and now the Holy Spirit will retrace those steps with us, step-by-step.

The bottom of the ladder is where we all have fallen and now find ourselves, believing that we are bodies living in a world that is real and that is our home. And we have all these physical and psychological needs that have to be met—otherwise we cannot exist. Basically all of them, in one form or another, represent our specialness needs. That is the bottom of the ladder.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 1-2) Prayer has no beginning and no end. It is a part of life.

This level is the top of the ladder—the song of prayer.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 3) But it does change in form, and grow with learning until it reaches its formless state, and fuses into total communication with God.

The formless state is the song of prayer—the absence of anything related to duality or need. Nonetheless, our fear of the formless love is so great that we have placed many layers of filters between ourselves and that love. And so the love is filtered through, and then is expressed in specific experiences that we see as meeting our needs. These experiences are not the reality of love or Jesus' reality—they are simply what our fear has reduced the love to. We are so afraid of being in Jesus' presence that we have to diffuse his power, his love, his light. But then we make the mistake of taking the diffusion to be the reality, instead of simply an aspect or a reflection of it.

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(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 1) These forms of prayer, or asking-out-of-need, always involve feelings of weakness and inadequacy, and could never be made by a Son of God who knows Who he is.

Once we forget Who we are, we identify ourselves as a limited, fragmented, separated, sinful self. This self begins as a thought that is then projected from the mind and is experienced as a body—a limited, separated body that has all kinds of needs and inevitably will die. Certainly, even on the grossest physical level, we have tremendous needs. If we do not eat every day, we will get sick and die. If we do not have enough to drink or to breathe, we will die. These physical needs reinforce the sense of feeling

weak and inadequate. Then all of the psychological needs we believe we have reinforce that sense even further.

(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 2-3) No one, then, who is sure of his Identity could pray in these forms. Yet it is also true that no one who is uncertain of his Identity can avoid praying in this way.

That includes all of us. We all believe that we really are the person whom we look at in the mirror. We believe we are this personality to whom we give a name and a history. We believe we are this body, which we can describe, and which is in relationship with other bodies—that is a given. Yet this means all of us are insane. All of us believe that we have needs that must be met. None of us believes God is a loving Creator because, if we did, none of us would have run away from home and stayed away. The very fact that we are here witnesses to our belief that the ego thought system is real. That does not make it real—that does not mean that we are really here. But we believe that we are here.

Once we believe that we are here, we also believe that we have needs. And we either believe that God will ignore our needs because He is very angry at us, or we believe that He will magically take care of all of our needs. Remember—looking at the ego column on the chart—the ego's god in the world of form is someone who will pay no attention to us and, if we get anywhere near him, he will destroy us. Consequently, since we believe we are in the world of form, the correction is in the adjacent column—God is Someone Who cares for us, Who loves us, and Who answers our prayers and meets our needs. That is the very bottom of the ladder.

Skip now to the next paragraph.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 1-4) It is also possible to reach a higher form of asking-out-of-need, for in this world prayer is reparative, and so it must entail levels of learning. Here, the asking may be addressed to God in honest belief, though not yet with understanding. A vague and usually unstable sense of identification has generally been reached, but tends to be blurred by a deep-rooted sense of sin. It is possible at this level to continue to ask for things of this world in various forms, and it is also possible to ask for gifts such as honesty or goodness, and particularly for forgiveness for the many sources of guilt that inevitably underlie any prayer of need.

Jesus is now speaking of moving slowly up the ladder. At the bottom of the ladder we simply ask for the things of the world that we think we need. As we begin to grow, we still ask out of need, but we begin to ask for things that seem to be on a higher level. So we ask for release from fear or for forgiveness. But we are still asking of someone who is perceived outside us. So I pray to Jesus, "Please take away my fear." Last year I might have said to Jesus, "Please send me ten thousand dollars." Now I am saying, "Please take away my fear." Within the dream of this world, that would certainly be an improvement. But such a prayer is still based on the idea that he and I are separate, and that he has something that I do not have. The truth is that what he has, I have. The only difference is that I have forgotten it.

His role as my older brother who loves me is to remind me that I can make the same choice he did—I, too, can experience the peace and the Love of God. And he does not give it to me—he simply *reminds* me of the choice. But I begin first without any idea of Jesus, or with an idea of a Jesus who is angry at me. From that view of him, I grow into a view of a Jesus who is there for me, a Jesus who is not angry—but a Jesus who is different from me. He is a magical figure who can give me what I want—because he has it and I do not.

The Course explains in many different places—it is one of the most important ways of understanding special relationships—that it is impossible to love anyone whom I perceive as different from me. If I perceive you as different from me, then you must have what I do not have. We don't have time now to go into the dynamics of this, but the main point is that if you have something that I do not have, it's because you took it from me. That is what the fourth and fifth laws of chaos are about (T-23.II). I lack something, you have it, and I know why you have it and I do not: you *took* it from me. How could I possibly love someone who stole the Love and the peace of God, and the innocence of Christ from me?

This means that for all these centuries, the love that people have been professing for Jesus has really been hate, because they have seen him as having something they did not have—he is the only true Son of God, the only one whom God truly loves, the only one who is truly innocent and holy. We are all second-class citizens at best. And, at worst, we do not even deserve to be here. There is no way that we can love him. That is why the world had to kill him, and then, as if killing him were not enough, they had to destroy his message. And that certainly is why Catholics have to kill him every day on the altar at Mass. There is no love in this, which explains why, for all of the lovely words and good intentions, Christianity for the most part has ended up being a religion of hatred, murder, and death. That was its very root, because it saw Jesus as different from us.

Now, to see Jesus as different from us, in the sense that he is someone who loves us and is available to help us, is certainly a step above not believing in him at all, or believing he is someone who is angry and wrathful. But if we simply stop with that, we have not gained all that much. We have taken only a few small steps up from the bottom rung. As long as we see him as different, we will see ourselves as second best, and we will feel justified unconsciously, if not consciously, in hating him—he has what we do not have. That is why in those passages I read earlier, he says, "Don't ask me to take your fear away from you. I can't do that. All I can do is remind you of the power of your mind to choose to be loving and peaceful instead of fearful." That is what he does.

So again, when this passage speaks of "a higher form of asking-out-of-need," asking to be reminded of the choice we have is the higher form. But it is still asking-out-of-need.

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We will conclude our reading from *The Song of Prayer* with the last paragraph in this section.

(Paragraph 8 - Sentences 1-2) God is the goal of every prayer, giving it timelessness instead of end. Nor has it a beginning, because the goal has never changed.

This is reminiscent of the line in the text that tells us that we are on "a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed" (T-8.VI.9:7). True prayer is timeless, because true prayer is the song that the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father.

(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 3) Prayer in its earlier forms is an illusion, because there is no need for a ladder to reach what one has never left.

Forgiveness is an illusion. The miracle is an illusion. Salvation is an illusion. *A Course in Miracles* is an illusion. Jesus is an illusion. The Holy Spirit is an illusion. Everything here is an illusion, because we are not here. We have never left home, and so "there is no need for a ladder to reach what one has never left."

(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 4) Yet prayer is part of forgiveness as long as forgiveness, itself an illusion, remains unattained.

As long as we still believe that we are sinful and separated, we have a need for an illusion to correct our illusion. That is what forgiveness is.

(Paragraph 8 - Sentences 5-6) Prayer is tied up with learning until the goal of learning has been reached. And then all things will be transformed together, and returned unblemished into the Mind of God.

That basically is all of us.

(Paragraph 8 - Sentences 7-8) Being beyond learning, this state cannot be described. The stages necessary to its attainment, however, need to be understood, if peace is to be restored to God's Son, who lives now with the illusion of death and the fear of God.

These are the stages that constitute the ladder of prayer. *The Song of Prayer* speaks of a progression from praying for others, including our enemies, to realizing that we are really simply praying for ourselves. Although this issue takes us away from the theme of this workshop, we can understand the stages of prayer in terms of how we look at Jesus. We see Jesus, first, either as nonexistent or as a harsh judge who is angry at us or demands things from us. Next, he is seen as an elder brother who loves us, a magical figure who does things for us. Finally, we recognize that Jesus is simply the reminder of Who we are. At that point, Jesus as a separate identity disappears, we as separate identities disappear, and we all become one. These are stages that we can understand.

As long as we live "with the illusion of death and the fear of God," we need prayer in its lower forms. We all have the belief in death, we all believe we are going to die, and we fear God. None of us would be here in this body if we were not afraid of God. Why would we leave our home in Heaven? Why would we leave the reality of being at one with our Source and His Love and totally at peace with Him unless we were afraid of Him? In the delusion, we somehow believe that we are safer here, even though our experience is hardly that.

Everyone dies. Everyone's body dies. Our bodies suffer pain throughout our lives. So a part of us knows that this world does not work, this body does not work. Yet we continually persist in the belief that this is who we are and where we are, as if there is no other choice. The Course, thus, can be understood as the Love of God expressing itself within the illusion, meeting us where we believe we are, telling us that there is another way of looking at this, and providing us with a context and a framework with which we can make our way back up the ladder step-by-step. But we have to begin with the idea that we are at the bottom of the ladder, and not take that as an insult.

It is helpful as we read through the Course to keep in mind how often Jesus refers to us as children, or as *little* children. He does not call us adults, or wonderfully mature people. Over and over again, he says we are children. The Course is written for us as little children, in the form of Jesus as a wiser, older brother, who understands the difference between reality and illusion, and is trying to teach his little brothers and sisters something about which they do not have the foggiest idea. It is extremely humbling and helpful to accept the fact that, yes, we are as little children. It is not meant as an insult. If we can accept that, then we can begin to accept the help that is there.

When we deny that we are like children, we are reproducing the original error when we turned to God and said, "I don't need You any more. I can do it on my own. I can do it my way. I know better than You what I need and what I want. If You're not going to give it to me, I'll do it on my own." And so we did. We split off within the dream and made up a world and a self—an identity of which we say, "This is who I am." And somehow, in the insanity of our minds, we really believe this is better than the Heaven that we threw away. This obviously is not humility—it is the height of arrogance. And it certainly is not sanity. It is the height of insanity. Jesus is always asking us in the Course why we persist in believing in something that frankly does not work, and that we know does not work.

There are two lines in the text—a few hundred pages apart—that, if put together, read, "Resign now as your own teacher? for you were badly taught" (T-12.V.8:3; T-28.I.7:1). We steadfastly, stubbornly, and tenaciously refuse to do that. We say, "No, I am my own teacher, and I know what I'm doing," even though it is obvious that we do not at all know what we are doing, and that nothing that we have ever done on our own works. So basically Jesus is saying to us in the Course, "What you have done doesn't work. Why don't you at least give me or the Holy Spirit a try, because you can't lose anything? You've already lost everything. And nothing here is ever going to work or bring you happiness or peace."

But we are so terrified of love—we are so terrified of Jesus and of God—that we continually resist what Jesus says, putting up one barrier after another to keep his love away. The beginning of turning it around comes when we are able to recognize what we are doing and can then say, "You know, there's something really wrong here. Maybe, just perhaps, there's a slight chance that I have been wrong." That recognition is the invitation to the Holy Spirit that the Course talks about. That opens the door.

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Before moving on to the next part of the workshop, I would just like to say a few more words about the fear of God, insofar as it is so central to everything the Course teaches, and, invariably, people will say that they never really experience that fear.

It is true that most people are not aware of their fear of God, but yet, this is what leads to their resistance to Jesus' message. I would say that 99.99% of us are not aware of that terror, because we have all done such an effective job of denying it. This whole world was literally made as a cover for that terror, as I have said so often. And everything within the world, including our bodies, was specifically made to be the cover for that terror. So it makes sense, then, that none of us would be in touch with it. What follows, however, is that we all then deny or react against what we really believe at a deeper level. In psychology, this is what is known as reaction formation.

Thus, while we all believe that God is going to destroy us, and that is why we are here in the world, we cover that with a concept that says, "No, God is Someone Who loves me." That is why so many religions—and certainly it has been a hallmark of Judaism and Christianity—spend so much time telling God how much we love Him, and in praising and glorifying Him. Recall the famous line in *Hamlet*: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." If we stepped back and really looked at how much energy we expend in telling God how wonderful He is, we would have to question why we do it. As Jesus tells us in the Course, God does not have an ego with which to accept our praise (T-4.VII.6:3). So, obviously, we are not praising God for His benefit. But, just as obviously, our praise does a great deal for us. It is simply our attempt to convince ourselves that we really love God, that we are not angry at God, and that God is not the enemy.

This, then, is the Course's argument. Why would any of us in our right minds come here, if we were not afraid of God, and were not trying to hide from Him and His Love? This world is a place of death. The Course says that the body was made as a limit on love (T-18.VIII.1:2-3). In fact, that is such an important point that Jesus clarifies it and says, "Think not this is merely allegorical." He means very literally that the body was made as a limit on love. But why would anyone want to encase love, containing it in this narrow, ugly, smelly cylinder that we call a body, and then say, "This is who I am. This is love," when I could be totally at one with Who I really am as spirit, as Christ, Who is Love. Thus, the very fact that we believe we are here in the body is telling us that we are willing to settle for this much love instead of an oceanful.