

Sharing Our Spiritual Lives

By Kaye Cooper

"Sharing one's spiritual life with one's fellows" is one of those "habits which favor religious growth." (1095:3/100.1.8) Study groups provide an excellent opportunity for us to share our spiritual lives.

The central point of *The URANTIA Book*, what is most important to gain from it, is the gospel: God is our Father and therefore all men and women are our spiritual brothers. But the book was not given to us so we could understand that with our minds. It was given to us so that we would come to experience sonship with our Father—a personal, spiritual relationship with him in which we perceive his watchcare and seek to follow his guidance. As a result of that spiritual experience, we will come to love our fellows more, to feel a kinship with them. That love will be translated into ministry to our brothers.

The purpose of study groups is not simply to learn the facts presented in *The URANTIA Book*. Granted, they are fascinating, inspiring, satisfying facts; but learning those facts is not enough. Study groups also provide a place to encourage each other in our spiritual quest for God, a place to serve our fellow believers, a place to share appropriate group spiritual experiences. Many groups are places of spiritual growth, encouragement and sharing. This column is a space where each of us can learn what other groups are trying and benefitting from.

With each issue of the *Study Group Herald*, I would like to describe the experiences of a study group which has found ways to increase the spiritual nourishment of its meetings.

This first time I will share the technique I have most frequently experienced in the study groups I have attended. In the group which meets in my home we devote part of our meeting time to an event we refer to as "prayers and thankfals." Each person has a

turn to tell the others what he would like to pray for. These may vary from an ailing friend to guidance for world leaders to more joy and insight for us all. In a second round each person shares what he is thankful for. As each person speaks, the others join silently in the prayer or thanksgiving, each in his own way and may even add to or talk about the prayer or thanksgiving subject.

This prayers and thankfulness time is not usually hushed and solemn. More often it is full of laughter, sympathy and caring. We end with several minutes of silent worship. One member of the group volunteers to signal an end to this quiet time to avoid uncertainty. This whole spiritual sharing process is one which seems very comfortable to our visitors. They join in readily and surprise us with the quality of their participation. The process is comfortable, casual, easy, friendly and intimate. When you are sharing someone's sincere prayers, you are sharing something that is genuine and spiritually real about them and you.

We have observed wonderful fruits from this time of spiritual sharing. When our lives are difficult, it is easier to mention our difficulties and receive strength, support and loving ministry from other study group members. We have the opportunity to ask the opinions of others who have our same values. In our individual lives, fear and pain are reduced; joy and peace are multiplied. We feel that the sharing of the prayers and thankfulness time has greatly enhanced the bond of friendship between us. It has contributed to our individual spiritual growth and has inspired us to live the teachings we are studying.

Prayers and thankfulness take a large part of the study group time, but we have come to feel that the time is well-spent.

[I invite you to send me your experiences of sharing your spiritual lives in the study group. Please describe what your group does and the results you think it has had.]