

**Spiritual support groups
from a *Urantia Book*
reader's perspective**

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**Presented in Chicago, Illinois
as part of the Wrightwood Series
April 3-5, 1992**

Overview

"Man is innately a social creature; he is dominated by the craving of belongingness. (p. 1227C)

This truth, so dramatically stated in *The Urantia Book*, is also the foundation of *The Different Drum - Community Making and Peace* by M. Scott Peck, author, lecturer and founder of The Foundation for Community Encouragement, Inc. Peck states, "On my lecture tours across the country the one constant I have found wherever I go--the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, or West Coast--is the lack of--and the thirst for--community." (p. 57)

Peck further states, "Trapped in our tradition of rugged individualism, we are an extraordinarily lonely people. So lonely, in fact, that many cannot even acknowledge their loneliness to themselves, much less to others." (p. 58) *The Urantia Book* explains that "Religion effectively cures man's sense of idealistic isolation or spiritual loneliness . . ." (p. 1117A) and it further states, "But no God-knowing mortal can ever be lonely in his journey through the cosmos, for he knows that the Father walks beside him each step of the way, while the very way that he is traversing is the presence of the Supreme." (p. 1291B) An antidote for man's loneliness and craving of belongingness is a spiritual support group, because it can give members a feeling of belonging and being loved, while at the same time it can nurture their connection with God, which is the only truly infallible cure for loneliness.

Jesus repeatedly included in his message the imperative to "love one another." He explained to Ganid that "To become acquainted with one's brothers and sisters, to know their problems and to learn to love them, is the supreme experience of living" (p. 1431A) and among his last instructions to his apostles was the statement, "You shall love one another with a new and startling affection . . ." (p. 2044C) The importance of loving our fellows is highlighted in the statement, ". . . the great problem of religious living consists in the task of unifying the soul powers of the personality by the dominance of love." (p. 1097D)

The Urantia Book, however, explains that "You cannot truly love your fellows by a mere act of will. Love is only born of thoroughgoing understanding of your neighbor's motives and sentiments." (p. 1098C) It also points out, "When a wise man understands the inner impulses of his fellows, he will love them." (p. 1898C)

A spiritual support group can provide opportunity to really get to know and understand other members, and "If once you understand your neighbor, you will become tolerant, and this tolerance will grow into friendship and ripen into love." (p. 1098B) Even Jesus ". . . craved a trustworthy and confidential friend." (p. 1291C) Undeniably, the loving relationships which can develop in a support group are a major reason for participation. "Everything nonspiritual in human experience, excepting personality is a means to an end. Every true relationship of mortal man with other persons--human and divine--is an end in itself." (p. 1228B)

Furthermore, the spiritual component is essential because, as *The Urantia Book* points out, "Only a God-knowing individual can love another person as he loves himself." (p. 196B) A group where members are learning to truly love one another must have a spiritual base because "All true love is from God, and man receives the divine affection as he himself bestows this love upon his fellows. Love is dynamic. It can never be captured; it is alive, free, thrilling, and always moving. Man can never take the love of the Father and imprison it within his heart. The Father's love can become real to mortal man only by passing through that man's personality as he in turn bestows this love upon his fellows. The great circuit of love is from the Father, through sons to brothers, and hence to the Supreme." (p. 1289B)

The combined nature of a spiritual support group is appropriate because ". . . many souls can best be led to love the unseen God by being first taught to love their brethren whom they can see. . . ." (p. 1727C) while, on the other hand, "You will learn to love your brethren more when you first learn to love their Father in heaven more, and after you have become truly more interested in their welfare in time and in eternity. And all such human interest is fostered by understanding sympathy, unselfish service, and unstinted forgiveness." (p. 1955D)

Thus, since love flows in an unbroken circuit, we can plug into it through worship of the Father, through realization of the spirit in ourselves, through passing the Father's love on to our fellows, or through our soul connection in the Supreme. Regardless of our point of entry, once we tap in we are involved in the entire circuit.

A spiritual support group can offer practice in working together and "One of the most important lessons to be learned during your mortal career is *teamwork*" (p. 312A). Teamwork is so important that we continue to work on it well beyond our mortal careers. For example, a comprehensive program is outlined for living and working with diverse fellow morontians and univitatia on the

constellation training worlds. (p. 494D) Only the Solitary Messengers work alone in the universe. (p. 256D)

Forming spiritual support groups may be a way to cooperate with the universal plan, since "Social architects do everything within their province and power to bring together suitable individuals that they may constitute efficient and agreeable working groups on earth." (p. 432D)

Working in a group can also, perhaps, aid the angels in their tasks. "Seraphim are mind stimulators; they continually seek to promote circle-making decisions in human mind. They do this, not as does the Adjuster, operating from within and through the soul, but rather from the outside inward, working through the social, ethical, and moral environment of human beings." (p. 1245A) The trust-building function of a support group can help the Spirits of Trust, whose mission it is "to inculcate trust into the minds of evolving men." (p. 437D)

Through support groups, we can likewise help to manifest the oneness Jesus prayed that we would know when he said, "And now, my Father, I would pray not only for these eleven men but also for all others who now believe, or who may hereafter believe the gospel of the kingdom through the word of their future ministry. I want them all to be one, even as you and I are one. . . . If my children are one as we are one, and if they love one another as I have loved them, all men will then believe that I came forth from you and be willing to receive the revelation of truth and glory which I have made." (p. 1964D)

Spiritual support groups can accomplish one or all of the following broad purposes:

1. to provide opportunities for members to understand themselves better, to raise low self-esteem, and to more completely love their fellows;
2. to enhance members' ability to solve their own earthly problems and live more spiritual lives, through providing a loving atmosphere, reflecting spiritual perspectives and encouraging spiritual approaches to problem solving;
3. to actively support the religious growth of members; and
4. to provide avenues for service to one's fellows.

Low self-esteem is all too common in our society and support groups can help people to appreciate their true worth through loving interactions and through reminders of the fact that we are children of God. "The love of God strikingly portrays the transcendent value

of each will creature, unmistakably reveals the high value which the Universal Father has placed upon each and every one of his children from the highest creator personality of Paradise status to the lowest personality of will dignity among the savage tribes of men in the dawn of the human species on some evolutionary world of time and space." (p. 138B)

Support group members can take their lead from Jesus who said, "It is the purpose of this gospel to restore self-respect to those who have lost it and to restrain it in those who have it. . . . Forget not that I will stop at nothing to restore self-respect to those who have lost it, and who really desire to regain it." (p. 1765D)

Understanding oneself and others better is another value to be derived from a support group and, "Society is concerned with self-perpetuation, self-maintenance, and self-gratification, but human self-realization is worthy of becoming the immediate goal of many cultural groups." (p. 764D) "The soil essential for religious growth presupposes a progressive life of self-realization . . ." (p. 1094D) Through becoming "mirrors" for each other members of a support group can further the self-realization of participants. "Mutual understanding and fraternal love are transcendent civilizers and mighty factors in the world-wide realization of the brotherhood of man." (p. 598B) Furthermore, "Truly educated persons are not satisfied with remaining in ignorance of the lives and doings of their fellows" (p. 1674B) and "When a wise man understands the inner impulses of his fellows, he will love them." (p. 1898C)

One of the most important benefits of a spiritual support group is a deeper experience of loving one's fellows. "And again and again he [Jesus] impressed upon them that love is the greatest relationship in the world--in the universe. . ." (p. 1615D)

The Urantia Book gives guidelines on how to experience more profound love and a spiritual support group can be a great place to reinforce practicing these teachings. "If you love your neighbor as you love yourself, you really know that you are a son of God." (p. 1600C) "Man even qualifies himself for the restraining garments of mercy when he dares to love his fellow men, while he achieves the beginnings of spiritual brotherhood when he elects to mete out to them that treatment which he himself would be accorded, even that treatment which he conceives that God would accord them." (p. 1302D) This quote, which refers to daring to love ones fellows, points out that proffering love can involve risk. Humans, unlike God, feel rejection when they extend love and receive indifference. In a support group, members can reinforce each other in continuing to

take the risks which ultimately pay off abundantly in spiritual growth.

"Love is the highest motivation which man may utilize in his universe ascent. But love, divested of truth, beauty, and goodness, is only a sentiment, a philosophic distortion, a psychic illusion, a spiritual deception. Love must always be redefined on successive levels of morontia and spirit progression." (p. 2096) A spiritual support group can provide the opportunity to better understand and refine the totality of one's experience of loving.

Applying spiritual principles to solving material problems is another legitimate purpose of a support group. As Jesus pointed out, "It is the Father's will that mortal man should work persistently and consistently toward the betterment of his estate on earth." (p. 1661B) Jesus is eager for us to lead happy lives. He said, "Let me repeat: I have come that my brethren in the flesh may have joy, gladness, and life more abundantly." (p. 1558D)

The spiritual support group can help members realize that spiritual living is instrumental in material problem solving. "The sincere religionist is conscious of universe citizenship and is aware of making contact with sources of superhuman power. He is thrilled and energized with the assurance of belonging to a superior and ennobled fellowship of the sons of God. The consciousness of self-worth has become augmented by the stimulus of the quest for the highest universe objectives--supreme goals." (p. 1100C)

The powerful truths of *The Urantia Book* can provide the cosmic perspective to give individuals courage, hope and assurance of ultimate happiness which can greatly reduce the suffering in even the most tragic human situation. One can not but respond optimistically to the good news encapsulated in such quotes as the following: "The Father loves each of his sons, and that affection is not less than true, holy, divine, unlimited, eternal, and unique--a love bestowed upon *this* son and upon *that* son, individually, personally, and exclusively. And such a love utterly eclipses all other facts." (p. 454B)

"Even as mortals, so have these angels been father to many disappointments, and they will point out that sometimes your most disappointing disappointments have become your greatest blessings." (p. 555C)

"The Creators are possessed of full power to make Urantia a veritable paradise, but such an Eden would not contribute to the development of those strong, noble, and experienced characters which the Gods are so surely forging out on your world between the

anvils of necessity and the hammers of anguish. Your anxieties and sorrows, your trials and disappointments, are just as much a part of the divine plan on your sphere as are the exquisite perfection and infinite adaptation of all things to their supreme purpose on the words of the central and perfect universe." (p. 258C)

"There is a great and glorious purpose in the march of the universe through space. All of your mortal struggling is not in vain. We are all part of an immense plan, a gigantic enterprise, and it is the vastness of the undertaking that renders it impossible to see very much of it at any one time and during any one life." (p. 364B)

"The greatest affliction of the cosmos is never to have been afflicted. Mortals only learn wisdom by experiencing tribulation." (p. 556D)

"You cannot perceive spiritual truth until you feelingly experience it, and many truths are not really felt except in adversity." (p. 557A)

"To a God-knowing kingdom believer, what does it matter if all things earthly crash?" (p. 1096C)

"But man can even now foretaste this providence in its eternity meanings as he ponders the universe fact that all things, be they good or evil, work together for the advancement of God-knowing mortals in their quest for the Father of all." (p. 1306D)

"True religion is designed to lessen the strain of existence; it releases faith and courage for daily living and unselfish serving. Faith promotes spiritual vitality and righteous fruitfulness." (1727D)

"There is no material reward for righteous living, but there is profound satisfaction--consciousness of achievement--and this transcends any conceivable material reward." (p. 325D)

Truths such as these can be great comfort and inspiration for those struggling with individual difficulties.

In addition to growing personally through focus on spiritual truths, members of a support group can enrich each others' lives. "The more fully we bestow ourselves upon our fellows, the more fully we come to love them." (p. 1419B) The long-term commitment of a support group can provide ample opportunity for "bestowing ourselves upon" each other. Love can manifest more quickly and with greater depth because of the clear intention and focused environment.

Jesus taught his associates to recognize and minister to those with troubled minds as well as to those with physical illness. He instructed them to, "Liberate spiritual captives, comfort the oppressed, and minister to the afflicted." (p. 1584A) He further ". . .

told his associates about the three forms of affliction . . ." which included "Troubled minds--those nonphysical afflictions which were subsequently looked upon as emotional and mental difficulties and disturbances." (p. 1590D)

Comfort for those with troubled minds is still sorely needed in today's society. "During the psychologically unsettled times of the twentieth century, amid the economic upheavals, the moral crosscurrents, and the sociological rip tides of the cyclonic transitions of a scientific era, thousands upon thousands of men and women have become humanly dislocated; they are anxious, restless, fearful, uncertain, and unsettled; as never before in the world's history they need the consolation and stabilization of sound religion." (p. 1090A) A spiritual support group can help such unsettled individuals experience the fact that ". . . true religion is the cure for soul hunger, spiritual disquiet, and moral despair." (p. 1078D) The *Urantia Book* explains, "It is only natural that mortal man should be harassed by feelings of insecurity as he views himself inextricably bound to nature while he possesses spiritual powers wholly transcendent to all things temporal and finite. Only religious confidence--living faith--can sustain man amid such difficult and perplexing problems." (p. 1222D)

A parallel purpose of a spiritual support group is to enrich the religious lives of each participant. "The highest happiness is indissolubly linked with spiritual progress. Spiritual growth yields lasting joy, peace which passes all understanding." (p. 1098A)

In describing the necessity to create a new cult, *The Urantia Book* explains, "The new cult must, like the old, foster sentiment, satisfy emotion, and promote loyalty; but it must do more: it must facilitate spiritual progress, enhance cosmic meanings, augment moral valued, encourage social development, and stimulate a high type of personal religious living." (p. 966B) A support group environment can further all of these goals.

Although ". . . religion is purely and wholly a matter of personal experience" (p. 1593C), it is also true that "Habits which favor religious growth embrace . . . recognition of religious living in others, . . . and sharing one's spiritual life with one's fellows. . . ." (p. 1095). Furthermore, "Spiritual growth is mutually stimulated by intimate association with other religionists," (p. 1094C) and "Human friendship and divine religion are mutually helpful and significantly illuminating if the growth in each is equalized and harmonized." (p. 1089C)

Moreover, "It is a fact that religion does not grow unless it is disciplined by constructive criticism, amplified by philosophy,

purified by science, and nourished by fellowship. . . ." (p. 1088D) and one "real purpose in the socialization of religion" is "to provide wise counsel and spiritual guidance." (1092B) A spiritual support group can provide constructive criticism, fellowship, wise counsel and spiritual guidance. Much mutual benefit can be derived from a group of sincere believers who meet regularly with the purpose (or at least one purpose) of stimulating and nurturing each other's spiritual growth, using teachings gleaned from the *Urantia Book* and other spiritual sources and experiences.

The practice which most effectively stimulates religious growth is service. "The contact of the mortal mind with its indwelling Adjuster, while often favored by devoted meditation, is more frequently facilitated by wholehearted and loving service in unselfish ministry to one's fellow creatures." (p. 1000B) Furthermore, ". . . true religion is a living love, a life of service" (p. 1100D). The experience of helping group members more fully connect with God can be an invaluable service. As *The Urantia Book* points out, ". . . those who lead men to God experience the supreme satisfaction of human service." (p. 1465C)

In addition to serving each other through a spiritual support group, the group can plan and carry out service projects together. "Jesus never failed to exalt the sacredness of the individual as contrasted with the community. But he also recognized that man develops his character by unselfish service; that he unfolds his moral nature in loving relations with his fellows." (p. 1862C) The rewards of service also go beyond personal character building. "Service--purposeful service, not slavery--is productive of the highest satisfaction and is expressive of the divinest dignity." (p. 316C) Service projects are often best planned and carried out in groups, and can offer the added appeal of fellowship in serving together.

Although religious growth can be initiated by individuals, "Religion is first an inner or personal adjustment, and then it becomes a matter of social service or group adjustment." (p. 1090D) Thus, a spiritual support group can be a valuable part of one's religious life. The advantages of pursuing spiritual growth in a group are also pointed out in the following quote: "While your religion is a matter of personal experience, it is most important that you should be exposed to the knowledge of a vast number of other religious experiences (the diverse interpretations of other and diverse mortals) to the end that you may prevent your religious life from becoming egocentric--circumscribed, selfish, and unsocial."

(p.1130A) Furthermore, "A social group of human beings in co-ordinated working harmony stands for a force far greater than the simple sum of its parts." (p. 1477A)

In encouraging the formation of social groups, *The Urantia Book* states, "These associations of friendship and mutual affection are socializing and ennobling because they encourage and facilitate the following essential factors of the higher levels of the art of living:

1. Mutual self-expression and self-understanding. . . .
2. Union of souls - the mobilization of wisdom. . . .
3. The enthusiasm for living. . . . and
4. The enhanced defense against all evil." (p. 1775D)

While ". . . such inspiring and ennobling association finds its ideal possibilities in the human marriage relation . . . much is attained out of marriage, and many, many marriages utterly fail to produce these moral and spiritual fruits." (p. 1777A) In addition, *The Urantia Book* points out, "Truly, monogamy is ideal for those who are in, but it must inevitably work great hardship on those who are left out in the cold of solitary existence." (p. 927C) Spiritual support groups can fill the gap for those who are not married or who are in less-than-ideal marriages. Furthermore, "Even families and nations will enjoy life more if they share it with others." (p. 1220C) So, married people can also benefit from spiritual support groups.

Intentional communities, in which families "enjoy life more by sharing it with others" are a logical extension of the benefits of a spiritual support group. The advantages of a support group can be magnified in an intentional community, and the benefit of self-maintenance through a shared financial enterprise may be added. While this paper only touches upon the topic of intentional community, I encourage further effort in that direction.

The rest of this paper dips into the arena of intentional community, discusses some practical aspects of forming a spiritual support group, and concludes with an appendix of additional quotes from *The Urantia Book* which have implications for the functioning of spiritual support groups.

Intentional community as spiritual support

Perhaps the ultimate spiritual support group is the intentional community with a spiritual focus. *The Urantia Book* states, "Economic interdependence and social fraternity will ultimately conduce to brotherhood." (p. 1093A)

Intentional communities can be extremely practical as well. "Primitive human beings early learned that groups are vastly greater and stronger than the mere sum of their individual units. . . . But co-operation is not a natural trait of man; he learns to co-operate first through fear and then later because he discovers it is most beneficial in meeting the difficulties of time and guarding against the supposed perils of eternity." (p. 763D)

An intentional community can represent society at its best. "It is the business and duty of society to provide the child of nature with a fair and peaceful opportunity to pursue self-maintenance, participate in self-perpetuation, while at the same time enjoying some measure of self-gratification, the sum of all three constituting human happiness." (p. 794C) Successful communities fit this description well and also parallel the fact that ". . . later civilizations are the better promoted by intelligent co-operation, understanding fraternity, and spiritual brotherhood." (p. 805C)

Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson in *Builders of the Dawn: Community Lifestyles in a Changing World* state, "Community probably provides the most profound and intense experience of personal growth that is available anywhere, if a person is open to it. The ultimate purpose of community is self-transcendence, going beyond our limited sense of self to realize our oneness with all others," (p. 30) This book, published in 1986 by Sirius Publishing, Shutesbury, Massachusetts, is a thorough discussion of intentional community. It gives details of many successful communities, guidelines for those who would like to create or become involved in a community, and addresses and phone numbers of many intentional communities for those interested in more information.

In support of the *Urantia Book* statement that, "There is always danger that monotony of human contact will greatly multiply perplexities and magnify difficulties" (p. 1611D), the authors make the point that, "The new communities are not utopias where life is always easy and joyful. . . . All the big issues in personal life--money,

power, sex--are also big issues in community, but the basic agreement of community life is to work these problems out consciously and not to avoid them." (p. 61) They further state, "The most important thing is not whether the community as a form, a structure in itself, succeeds or fails but rather whether it serves the growth of the people who comprise it." (p. 333)

One point the authors make is that successful communities include a service component. They state, "But in order for a community to last more than a couple of years, it needs to be focused on more than the immediate survival, benefit, or happiness of its own members. . . . When a community is able to turn outward and serve the needs of society, it lifts the whole group and thereby helps the growth of its members." (p. 52)

This point reflects the *Urantia Book* truth that, "the highest happiness is linked with the intelligent and enthusiastic pursuit of worthy goals, and that such achievements constitute true progress in cosmic self-realization." (p. 1037B)

Builders of the Dawn includes a quote from Jim Frid, who lived at Sunrise Ranch in Colorado and later started the Washington, D.C. Emissaries of Divine Light Community: "When communities only come together because of convenience or common interests, sooner or later that breaks down. It's not a cohesive reason to be together and to go through all the dynamics of close living. To be successful you've got to have something vastly more important at your core than common interest, or even the "common good," which is what most people think of when they think of community. You must participate with a concern for something larger than yourself. I think personal growth is a matter of service. We grow through service." (p. 52)

Fried added, "The greatest reason why Sunrise Ranch in Colorado and 100-Mile House in Vancouver, Canada, have lasted over thirty years is that the people there are not just drawn together on the basis of horizontal relationships. They're not merely drawn to each other. They're individually drawn to something higher than themselves, and then they naturally find themselves together, seeking to express that higher purpose. They found that they wanted to serve the larger world in various ways in that expression, and community is a natural and organic expression of that desire." (p. 314)

The Emissaries' community is one of the most successful spiritual communities in this country, having existed for almost 50 years and having expanded to 12 major centers and numerous

smaller centers throughout this and other countries. The international network also includes many who do not live in the centers but who affiliate themselves with the appealing spiritual beliefs through subscriptions to publications and/or participation in worships held at the centers. Their ties to the earth through farming are important, along with their spiritual focus.

A publication entitled *A Conversation About Emissaries*, published by the 100 Mile Lodge Community, Canadian Headquarters for the international Emissary program, explains their spiritual approach: "To us, the name 'Emissary' applies to anyone who brings a stable, true and loving spirit into his or her life. An Emissary has acknowledged that there is a great deal more potential to human beings than is usually actualized. Our approach is to take full responsibility for ourselves as individuals, and to face and let go of attitudes that limit the release of our own potential. Through giving we discover ourselves, and our concern is to give whatever is practical and helpful into any situation. There are no doubt thousands of people whose presence where they are is radiant and uplifting--bringing light--and who in our terms are Emissaries. What we are doing does not require labels or a set of regulations, of do's and don'ts." (p. 3) This attitude of inclusivity rather than exclusivity partially explains their success as a community.

In response to the question, "Are you Christian?" the pamphlet responds, "We acknowledge Jesus. Because divine light shone potently through him, his life has had an effect on the whole world through centuries of history. He was the outstanding example of the masterful living that we see as possible for every human being." (p. 3)

Information about the Emissaries of Divine Light is available from Sunrise Ranch, Loveland, Colorado 80537, phone number (303) 667-4675 or Emissary Foundation International, Box 9, 100 Mile House, British Columbia, Canada VOK 2E0, phone number (604) 395-4077.

"Urantia Hill" is a community in Captain Cook, Hawaii. According to Martain Quincy, a member, it began in 1976 when the original community members actively sought *Urantia Book* readers to buy adjoining land. They are not formally organized as an intentional community, although they have Urantia meetings twice a month. "We are simply a neighborhood with *The Urantia Book* as common ground," according to Quincy. "There is," he added, "a continuing spontaneous element of activities that individuals sponsor. The main benefit of community is the support of close neighbors." Although there is no organized support group, "The

spiritual support group is a spontaneous activity in times of need that is met singly or by groups or combinations of families. We are a group that has been together so long just about every family has had to work out problems from minor to very major with just about every other family."

Quincy said, "In most aspects the community is working very well." However, he mentioned, "We have a couple of individuals who are basically self-ostracized from the community because of inability to treat their fellows fairly. That will always be a problem for communities as there is a percentage of humanity that can't function socially."

He expressed an interest in helping other aspiring communities and his main advice is that "each family must own their own property." Several attempts at joint ownership of property in the "Urantia Hill" community have failed.

Quincy summarized, "Although we as a group have had many feuds and seeming failures of brotherhood, have felt disgust at others for inability to communicate, from the long term view there has been created such an excellent growing up place for the children and opportunities for the angels that all in all this community is a great success."

Practical tips

Specific purposes

Drawing on my group facilitation training and discussions with several people who have sincere interest in and experience with spiritual support groups, I have concluded that one of the most important criteria for success is a clear purpose or purposes.

The Urantia Book states, "Just as certainly as men share their religious beliefs, they create a religious group of some sort which eventually creates common goals. Someday religionists will get together and actually effect co-operation on the basis of unity of ideals and purposes rather than attempting to do so on the basis of psychological opinions and theological beliefs." (p. 1091B)

Perhaps one or a few persons with a clear idea of purpose will initiate the group and attract others who share their purpose. Alternately, a compatible group of individuals with a less-clearly defined purpose may get together and follow a process to clarify their purpose (or purposes). Either way, I believe it is essential to take whatever time is required to get consensus and clarity in relation to the purposes of the group and, unless all members share the same or very compatible purposes, the group is, in my opinion, doomed to fail or be dramatically less successful than it could have been. This is commonly an ongoing process and purposes often evolve and/or change over time, so provision should be made to allow for this growth of purpose.

The specific purpose or purposes of a given spiritual support group will be defined by the group members. Some examples of possible purposes and some thoughts on how the purposes might be actualized are explained below.

1. Support for learning to love more profoundly: Since every relationship is an end in itself, developing loving relationships is an important purpose of every support group, regardless of other purposes the group may have. "And no amount of piety or credal loyalty can compensate for the absence in the life experience of kingdom believers of that spontaneous, generous, and sincere friendliness which characterizes the spirit-born sons of the living

God." (p. 1951A) Thus, loving friendships should be the heart of any spiritual support group.

Furthermore, remember that many people learn to love God more by first learning to love their fellows more (p. 1727C) and Jesus stated, ". . . it is this supreme law of love for God and for man that I also declare to you as constituting the whole duty of man." (p. 1600A)

2. Support for putting spiritual beliefs into action:

"If we know God, our real business on earth is so to live as to permit the Father to reveal himself in our lives, and thus will all God-seeking persons see the Father and ask for our help in finding out more about the God who in this manner finds expression in our lives." (p. 1466C)

A group might have as its purpose promoting spiritual approaches to everyday living, encouraging members to transform their belief into action and solve material problems in spiritual ways. In this process, members are likely to uncover emotional issues such as insecurity, loneliness, fear and childhood contamination which have blocked their full expression of spirituality. They can be lovingly assisted in working through these emotional issues as they gain the courage and insight needed to live more spiritual lives.

Active listening, insightful feedback and expressions of love can help with emotional growth and spiritual problem solving. However, reminders of Jesus's teachings and other spiritual truths can be even more powerful.

A current member of a support group in Golden, Colorado of which I am a member stated, "A spiritual support group helps to keep one focused on truth and joy and higher things. When you get to share that with others, life is so much better."

Another member of this group commented, "It just feels so safe, and that is so very valuable!"

One aspect of relief for me is knowing that in that group I am being viewed with "spiritual eyes." Group members respond to me from the same belief system, so they can truly help me further my spiritual goals.

Prayer can be a useful tool, as part of the group process, or as a recommended resource for members in making decisions. "Prayer, even as a purely human practice, a dialogue with one's alter ego, constitutes a technique of the most efficient approach to the realization of those reserve powers of human nature which are stored and conserved in the unconscious realms of the human mind.

Prayer is a sound psychological practice, aside from its religious implications and its spiritual significance." (p. 1000C)

"Aside from all that is superself in the experience of praying, it should be remembered that ethical prayer is a splendid way to elevate one's ego and reinforce the self for better living and higher attainment. Prayer induces the human ego to look both ways for help: for material aid to the subconscious reservoir of mortal experience, for inspiration and guidance to the superconscious borders of the contact of the material with the spiritual, with the Mystery Monitor. (p. 997B)

"Prayer elevates man because it is a technique of progressing by the utilization of the ascending spiritual currents of the universe. Genuine prayer adds to spiritual growth, modifies attitudes, and yields that satisfaction which comes from communion with divinity. It is a spontaneous outburst of God-consciousness. God answers man's prayer by giving him an increased revelation of truth, an enhanced appreciation of beauty, and an augmented concept of goodness." (p. 1002A)

"Prayer is not a technique for curing real and organic diseases, but it has contributed enormously to the enjoyment of abundant health and to the cure of numerous mental, emotional, and nervous ailments. And even in actual bacterial disease, prayer has many times added to the efficacy of other remedial procedures." (p. 1000B)

"Prayer does not move the divine heart to liberality of bestowal, but it does so often dig out larger and deeper channels wherein the divine bestowals may flow to the hearts and souls of those who thus remember to maintain unbroken communion with their Maker through sincere prayer and true worship." (p. 2066A)

However, "Prayer must never be so prostituted as to become a substitute for action. All ethical prayer is a stimulus to action and a guide to the progressive striving for idealistic goals of superself-attainment." (p. 997D)

3. Support for constant connection with God: A support group may choose to use only spiritual tools, such as prayer, meditation and worship, to attempt the ultimate step of living as Jesus did, in constant communion with God. Such a group's purpose might be to exchange one's mind for the mind of Jesus and to live always "as if in the presence of God." A group at this level will not intellectualize or deal with emotional issues. It will attempt to deal with spirituality in its purest sense. A Boulder resident interested in this type of support group, explains the purpose as, "Supporting each other in making the inner connection with God and living continually

from that, rather than just focusing on what needs fixing in everyday life."

I am adding a paragraph here after hearing Dave and Marta Elders' presentation at the Wrightwood Series Seminar April 4, 1992. Their point about always "coming from the soul," making soul connection with everyone with which we come in contact and becoming one through the Supreme is a profound statement of the goal of spiritual growth which I have been pursuing, however haltingly, for years. The Elders' explanation has become a new framework for the growth I am asking my support group to support. I highly recommend that anyone interested in spiritual support group read Dave and Marta's presentation.

4. Secondary support: The support function may be a by-product of a group with a worthwhile purpose not specifically defined as support for members. For example, Julio Edwards, a Denver *Urantia Book* reader, has produced a cable network television show called *Spiritual Spectrum* for over five years. Since September, 1986, he and his crew have aired and taped seventy-five one hour religious and philosophical panel discussions featuring over 200 ministers, theologians, philosophers, scientists, artists, counselors, attorneys, teachers, directors and lay religionists. "The common thread of all shows," according to Julio, "has been the maintenance of a monthly forum for Denver's spiritual leaders to share their views with each other and the public and, in turn, thereby to learn to respect and appreciate the unity of spirit amongst such a marvelous variety of thinkers and communicators." The common goal is "the materialization of the brotherhood of man."

Julio explained that, in the process of producing the show, a very meaningful spiritual support network has naturally evolved. Among his newfound friends are practitioners of many spiritual approaches. He has also noted that, without any conscious organization or encouragement, people who have met through *Spiritual Spectrum* have initiated friendships and shared projects which nurture further realization of brotherhood. One of many examples is a mutual friendship among Julio, a Baptist minister and a Hare Krishna leader. Julio refers to this phenomena as "unconscious support group."

The Urantia Book is so clear about the value of service to religious growth that a group may adopt as its goal supporting each other in carrying out service projects together and as individuals. A service-oriented group will invariably find that it also provides emotional support for its members.

An example of a spiritual service organization which provides personal support as a secondary benefit is Church Women United, an international interfaith organization. One of their well-publicized projects is the World Day of Prayer, which they have sponsored for 105 years. Chapters are active all over the world, providing service opportunities and fellowship for members.

A small group of *Urantia Book* readers in Boulder, Colorado, which recently formed with the stated purpose of becoming a spiritual support group, concluded after a few meetings that the best way to do this was to carry out service projects together.

The Denver-Boulder Women's Corps, a service organization of women who read the *Urantia Book*, has performed community service projects for over five years. They have found that, by doing service projects together, they also have formed a loving bond which is very rewarding. In the last couple of years, the group has added biannual retreats, to further enhance this support function. After the last retreat, the group also initiated a weekly spiritual support group as a function separate from the service projects.

Traditional *Urantia Book* study groups may also fit this category of secondary support. While the study group may have as its primary purpose to help readers more fully understand the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, close friendships usually develop through study groups, and many readers find them very emotionally and spiritually supportive.

While, for some, this secondary benefit is sufficient, others will feel a need to organize a group with spiritual support as the primary focus.

Structure and ground rules

An adjunct to the illumination of purpose is establishing a structure and set of guidelines or ground rules. Some groups will prefer as few rules as possible; others will be most comfortable with a relatively pervasive structure. Regardless of what is finally adopted, each group must address the issues of structure and ground rules. Some groups will be most comfortable hashing out these concerns thoroughly before the group officially begins; others will

resent taking too much time and getting too technical about these issues at the beginning and will prefer for them to unfold as the group proceeds. Either way, I believe two things are true: 1. agreeing on structure and ground rules is part of the group process and should be handled in a way that is compatible with the purposes of the group, and 2. the process is ongoing and will be present, formally or informally, throughout the life of the group. Included in this arena are decisions in areas such as the following:

1. Time: When and how often will the group meet? Will it meet for a specified number of weeks or will the duration be left open-ended? If no ending date is planned, how will the group know when it is time to end? If a specified number of weeks is set, will there be an option to continue for another period of time if the group chooses to continue? Will each meeting have a specified beginning and ending time? If so, how serious should group members be about the commitment to begin and end on time and will any exceptions be entertained? If the ending time is not pre-set, how will the group know when to end and will individuals be free to leave at different times? How will the group time be allotted to individual participants? Will each individual be allowed approximately equal time to participate each meeting, or will variation in individual needs determine the amount of time each individual will be the focus of attention each meeting? Will a system be established for each person to indicate at the beginning of the meeting approximately how much time he/she anticipates wanting to take later, to help plan the use of time for that meeting?

2. Space: Where will the group meet? Will the meeting space be consistent or rotating? How will seating be arranged?

3. Creature comforts: Will refreshments be available before, during and/or after the meetings? If so, what kind of refreshments will be provided and by whom? Will they be available in the actual meeting room or in an adjoining room? What lighting will be best? Will it vary for different parts of the meeting? How will the temperature be controlled? Will breaks be built in or will individuals be encouraged to use the rest room as needed? How will smoking be handled? Will members be allowed to participate if under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

4. Membership: How many members should be included? Should a minimum and/or maximum number be set? How should

members be recruited/accepted? What criteria, if any, should be used to accept or reject members? Who should decide whether or not an individual is allowed to become a member? Should the group be homogeneous or heterogeneous in regard to age, sex, marital status, religious beliefs/practices, etc.? Should members be allowed to join at any time, only the first meeting of each month, only at the beginning of a time block such as a three-month period, only at the time the group is established, etc.? What provisions, if any, should be established to allow the group to expel a member? What guidelines, if any, should be followed by a member who decides to terminate participation in the group?

5. Leadership: Will there be an established leader or facilitator? If so, how will he/she be chosen? If so, what will his/her role entail? Will the leadership/facilitation roles be shared among members? If so, how will these roles be defined and distributed? Will the group be defined as "leaderless" and each member be expected to help facilitate and keep the group focused on its purpose? What provisions will be made to adjust leadership if one or more members perceive a need for a change?

6. Format: Will the group adopt/adapt a format used by some currently successful group with similar purposes? Will the group structure evolve through group process? Will format and structure be decided in advance or will the group begin with only the intent and desires of members and let everything else unfold? Will the format be formal or informal? Will part of the leadership/facilitation role be to insure adherence to the accepted structure? Will the format/structure be planned as a framework for all meetings, or will each meeting be open for format suggestions on a spontaneous basis? If the structure is relatively consistent from meeting to meeting, will there be tolerance and provision for variations?

7. Commitment: To what extent will members be expected to commit to regular attendance? Will they be free to "drop in" or miss meetings spontaneously, or will they be expected to attend each meeting unless an emergency arises? Will members be expected to let someone know if they will not be attending a particular meeting? Will a provision be established to update members who miss a meeting on what happens in the meeting while they are gone? Will members commit to attempting to resolve conflicts (through a chosen conflict resolution process) rather than just dropping out if

dissatisfied? Will a consequence be established for those who fail to meet the level of commitment agreed upon by the group?

8. Trust building: To what extent is a high trust level necessary to accomplishing the group's purpose? If it is important, what will be done to build/increase the trust level among members? Will confidentiality be a norm? If so, will it extend to not discussing what happens in group with members who are absent for a given meeting? What do members need to feel safe in the group? How do group members define support? How does the definition of support change as the group matures?

9. Maintenance: What provisions will be built in to assure that the group continues to fulfill its purpose and meet the needs of the members? Will a system of feedback be incorporated which encourages members to share, on a regular or ongoing basis, their degree of satisfaction with the functioning of the group? If the group has an established leader and he/she either resigns or is removed, what contingency will be available to prevent the group's demise? If a conflict develops, how will it be handled? If communication problems develop within the group, how will the issue be brought up and dealt with? Will communication skills and/or group process training opportunities be made available to members? If hidden agendas are suspected, how will they be dealt with? How will the evolution of the group be nurtured so that members are unafraid to accommodate healthy changes?

Suggested formats

Each group will decide what format and structure to follow and how formally or informally they prefer to operate. The format must be designed to facilitate the purpose(s) of the group. This section presents some suggestions for formats.

Basic sharing group: A simple format I have seen used effectively for a spiritual support group with the purposes of enhancing loving relationships and encouraging spiritual problem solving follows the schedule below:

1. Begin with a few minutes of silence or meditation.
2. Give each member a few minutes to share what is relevant from his/her life since the last meeting and to indicate whether

he/she would like, later in the meeting, to spend more time sharing and getting feedback and support.

3. Devote the bulk of the meeting to the needs of individuals who asked for time during the opening round. Each person explains his/her relevant experiences, concerns and/or progress and lets the group know what he/she would like from them in response. The group offers feedback, reflection, relevant personal experience, loving comfort, reminders of spiritual wisdom from Jesus's teaching, etc. as fits the individual's needs.

4. The group ends with a few minutes of silence or perhaps with hugs or a group hug.

A variation on this general format is to decide in advance that each member will have an equal portion of the group time, thus making the opening round unnecessary. With this approach it may be necessary to assign someone as a timekeeper to tactfully keep people basically within their time allotment.

"Master Mind" group: The Church of Religious Science offers "Master Mind Groups" which have been very beneficial to many members. The groups meet for a set period of twelve weeks and expect regular attendance from participants. At the end of the twelve weeks, members can choose to continue for another twelve week period. One group in Michigan, for example, has been meeting for over five years.

The group has a trained facilitator, who leads trust-building exercises at the first meeting and explains the ongoing format. The basic structure is for members to share what they are working on in their daily lives and then the group prays together for the real needs of each individual, in essence giving the issues to God (or the Master Mind as they call it). A seven-step process is followed to help formulate successful prayers. In addition, each group member is asked to take time each day between meetings to focus on each group member and review that person's needs and give them to God. Group time is also used for members to share how the issues of others affect them and to share relevant common experiences; however, intellectualizing, suggesting techniques and trying to "fix" the other person are considered inappropriate.

According to one twelve week participant in Boulder, "It was surprising how quickly people got to know each other and how much people opened up. I would say the group was near the state of real community, as Scott Peck defines community, by the end of the twelve weeks."

For more information on this format, contact the nearest Church of Religious Science.

Inner guidance group: A recent Boulder resident described a spiritual support group which he had organized a few years ago in San Francisco which used mediation and following inner guidance as its basis. Although the group ended when he and another member left (partly because they had been meeting at the houses of these departing members), he felt it was very beneficial for the six months that it met.

He described the group as very homogeneous in their focus of living by inner guidance. The format included short meditations at the beginning and end of each group, with the rest of the meeting consisting of sharing by each of the 10 group members about what was meaningful in their lives during the intervening week and any issues they were working on. Group members gave input about what was "coming through" them (insight from their higher selves), reflecting the individual back to himself. They did not give advice, only interpretations and insights and respected the supremacy of the individuals' inner guidance.

He explained the benefits as "facilitating people to become clear on their purposes and intentions, and moving on them, not being blocked by human behaviors, and helping people reconnect to the principles they had forgotten, along with discharging emotions." He found that the emotional discharge could be done very quickly in the context of spiritual intent.

He also joined a spiritual support group in Boulder and described the primary benefit as, "to express as much as I am aware of what my self is working on at that time." He added, "The process of articulating in a concise fashion the comprehensiveness of my awareness helps me become further aware of insights and patterns of that inner working. Of course, others' observations are also valuable. The primary means is for each person to maintain connection to his/her higher center for the whole meeting. Another benefit that can and has accrued is for individual group members to keep in mind another's expressed desires and act on one of them during the week between meetings to allow for another's movement to take place."

Twelve or twenty-one step group: Another format which might be considered as a starting point for a spiritual support group is the one used in twelve step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Twelve step groups are all broadly spiritual in nature.

They have been the instrument for thousands of individuals to acknowledge the need for and the power of God in their lives.

Alternately, the book *21 Steps to Spiritual Awakening* by Harry McMullen could provide the foundation for a spiritual support group. It is an expansion of the twelve step approach, with a focus on teachings from *The Urantia Book*. A group meeting weekly could progress through the twenty-one steps in about six months. The book is published by ASOKA Foundation, P.O. Box 82009, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 71348.

Resonating Core group: Another well-developed format which could be adopted or adapted is described in *Love At The Core: A Guide to the Resonating Group Experience* by Christopher Hills, Ph.D, Barbara Marx Hubbard and the staff of The Center for Resonating Cores. It outlines a twelve week program for forming a "resonating core group," through creating loving relationships. The book is available from The Center for Resonating Cores, P.O. Box 867, Boulder Creek, California 95006. The phone number is (408) 338-6990.

Another book by Hills on resonating cores is *How to Create a Core Group: The Next Step in Human Evolution*. This book explains twelve essential attitudes and provides a series of lessons designed to help members reach a "state of co-creation, a state of harmony with God" through deepening love among members. Hills explains, "When an individual surrenders totally to the experience of pure love, he or she becomes a part of the intention of creation." (p. 7)

The address listed in this book is The University of the Trees, P.O. Box 347, Boulder Creek, California 95006. The phone number is (408) 338-9362.

A small group in Denver recently followed the process described in Hills' book, meeting for almost a year. One of the members of this group described the experience as a spiritual growth group in which meditation, trust building exercises, and shared inner experiences were integral parts. She found the group extremely beneficial and said she experienced some of the most profound mediations of her life as part of the process.

Recommendations and resources:

I do not pretend to be an expert on spiritual support groups, not do I believe that any one person has all of the answers for a sincere individual or group who wants to start a spiritual support

group. Jesus encouraged the Apostles to work out their own organizational details, under the leadership of Andrew, and he declined to step in when Andrew or Abner came to him with problems between the Apostles and the followers of John the Baptist.

While each group must work out what fits for its members, I offer the following recommendations gleaned from reading, personal experience, and interviews with others who have had experience with support groups.

For some, the suggestions in this paper may be most helpful after they organize a support group and find that it is not working as well as they had hoped; they may gain some insight into why the group is not as effective as it could be.

In my experience and that of those I have interviewed, that successful unfacilitated groups are rare and usually work only if all members are good communicators and fairly knowledgeable about effective group process and are all very compatible in their needs and understanding of the purpose of the group. The Urantia Book states, "The fact of man's gregariousness perforce determines that religious groups will come into existence. What happens to these religious groups depends very much on intelligent leadership." (p. 1090D)

While a "leader," in the sense of someone with special training or added authority, is not always necessary, it is important to have a facilitator or focalizer to help keep the group focused on its purpose and functioning effectively. Facilitation may rotate if more than one individual is comfortable in that role.

A totally laissez faire group is also rarely successful in the long run; beginning with a few clearly defined guidelines is recommended, to keep the group focused on its purpose and to equalize the benefits to all members. At some point, the group may transcend the guidelines or so fully integrate them that they may be less formally followed.

I highly recommend that a group begin with an established format adopted or adapted from another successful group. Over time, the group may make changes to fit its needs, but having a "tried and true" format to begin with can help the group progress more quickly.

Commitment is also typically essential to assure a group's longevity--commitment both to regular attendance and to the

purpose of the group. I recommend a policy precluding "unresolved exits." If a group member decides not to participate further, I believe it is important for him/her to explain his/her reasons to the group and give an opportunity to resolve any unfinished business with group members.

It may also be worthwhile to spend some time with communication skill training, since people, even with the best of intentions, may naturally fall into habits which interfere with group effectiveness, such as giving unwanted advice. Providing members with an understanding of group process and the stages of group development may also be helpful. Many books are available on these topics. Organizational development classes or seminars may also be available in your area.

Assuring that members understand group process can "set the group up" for success so they don't become threatened and disband when the group finds itself in a necessary stage of temporary disharmony.

M. Scott Peck has become a national consultant on community building since publishing *The Different Drum--Community Making and Peace* in 1987. I highly recommend this book to anyone involved in creating a spiritual support group. In it he describes the stages any group must go through in order to achieve "true community."

In an article in the September 15, 1989 issue of *Bottom Line/Personal* (published by Boardroom Reports, Inc. at 330 W. 42 St., New York 10036), Peck summarized the stages of community building as follows:

"• **Pseudocommunity.** During this stage, the group tries to fake it by avoiding conflict. Everyone is on his best behavior, trying not to offend the other members. Individual differences are denied, and everyone keeps his feelings to himself.

"• **Chaos.** This stage is a free-for-all in which the group tries to fight things out. Individual differences are right out in the open. Only now--instead of hiding them--the group tries to obliterate them by converting each other. . .

"Although chaos is often viewed as negative, fighting is a lot better than pretending to agree.

"Most groups emerge from this stage by organizing--electing committees and chairpeople. But an organization isn't a community.

"• **Emptiness.** In this, the most crucial stage on the road to community, the group breaks down all barriers to communication. This means dropping expectations, preconceptions and prejudices

and eliminating the need to control, convert or solve problems. It means celebrating rather than trying to change individual differences. . .

"As a group moves toward emptiness, its members start to share their defeats, failures, doubts, fears and inadequacies--a process that can be quite painful. Although it feels like the group is dying, it's really being reborn.

"• **Community.** Once emptiness has been achieved, the group becomes a community. People become quiet and peaceful. They feel sad and joyful at the same time. It's a lot like falling in love.

"*Ironic:* Once no one is trying to heal or convert anyone anymore, an extraordinary amount of healing and converting goes on.

"After a community has been formed, we graduate to community-maintenance. Agreements are written about how to sustain a sense of community, even though the group may occasionally fall back into chaos or pseudocommunity. *Key:* Even the strongest groups will need to go through the agonizing process over and over again." (p. 2)

Groups often fall apart when they reach the "chaos" stage because they do not realize that it is a normal part of their evolution and they do not know how to move through it. Peck offers the assurance, and the requisite techniques, to help a group through this stage.

The Apostles are a good example of a group which weathered the stages of chaos and emptiness to become true community. "They learned to differ, to debate, to contend, to pray, and to compromise, and throughout it all to remain sympathetic with the other person's viewpoint and to maintain at least some degree of tolerance for his honest opinions." (p. 1625D)

The "emptiness" stage to which Peck refers is essentially emptying oneself of judgments and beliefs that others must change. One must become like God in his ability to accept each individual. "God loves *each* individual as an individual child in the heavenly family. Yet God thus loves *every* individual; he is no respecter of persons, and the universality of his love brings into being a relationship of the whole, the universal brotherhood." (p. 138B)

This becomes easy if each group member remembers one of the Apostles' important lessons. "Increasingly they learned from Jesus to look upon human personalities in terms of their possibilities in time and in eternity." (p. 1708B)

Jesus explained, "Spiritual unity is derived from the consciousness that each of you is indwelt, and increasingly

dominated, by the spirit gift of the heavenly Father. Your apostolic harmony must grow out of the fact that the spirit hope of each of you is identical in origin, nature and destiny." (p. 1591C) And again, he said, "The only *uniform* thing about men is the indwelling spirit. Though divine spirits may vary somewhat in the nature and extent of their experience, they react uniformly to all spiritual appeals. Only through, and by appeal to, this spirit can mankind ever attain unity and brotherhood." (p. 1672D)

Peck, with others, also founded The Foundation for Community Encouragement, Inc., which defines community as "a group of two or more people who, regardless of the diversity of their backgrounds (social, spiritual, educational, ethic, economic, political, etc.) have been able to accept and transcend their differences, enabling them to communicate effectively and openly and to work together toward goals identified as being for their common good."

Information about this foundation and its services and training opportunities is available by writing to The Foundation for Community Encouragement, Inc. 109 Danbury Road, Suite 8, Ridgefield, Connecticut 06877. The phone number is (203) 431-9349.

Another resource which was mentioned to me by several people is The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, an ecumenical Christian organization which provides spiritual guidance programs and group leaders programs, along with a variety of other classes, groups and workshops at their center in Washington, D.C. Among their activities are, according to one of their brochures, "long term groups that provide an environment of support and encouragement for prayer and meditation and a variety of ways to help us attend God's grace in our lives," as well as short-term workshops, quiet days and retreats.

Their address is Shalem Foundation for Spiritual Formation, Mount St. Alban, Washington, D. C. 20016. Their phone number is (202) 966-7050.

Many more valuable resources are undoubtedly available and many other individuals have certainly had spiritual support group experiences worth recounting. My intention in making this presentation is to nurture discussion and action toward furthering more successful spiritual support group experiences for a wide variety of believers.

Additional quotes

The following quotes from The Urantia Book offer suggestions relevant to the functioning of a spiritual support group.

"Trust is the crucial test of will creatures. Trust-worthiness is the true measure of self-mastery, character." (p. 315D)

"'Coming up through great tribulation' serves to make glorified mortals very kind and understanding, very sympathetic and tolerant." (p. 538C)

"One of the functions of humor is to help all of us take ourselves less seriously. *Humor is the divine antidote for exaltation of ego.*" (p. 549B)

"Humor should function as an automatic safety valve to prevent the building up of excessive pressures due to the monotony of sustained and serious self-contemplation in association with the intense struggle for developmental progress and noble achievement. Humor also functions to lessen the shock of the unexpected impact of fact or of truth, rigid unyielding fact and flexible ever-living truth. The mortal personality, never sure as to which will next be encountered, through humor swiftly grasps--sees the point and achieves insight--the unexpected nature of the situation be it facts or be it truth.

While the humor of Urantia is exceedingly crude and most inartistic, it does serve a valuable purpose both as a health insurance and as a liberator of emotional pressure, thus preventing injurious nervous tension and overserious self-contemplation." (p. 549D)

"14. Whet the appetites of your associates for truth; give advice only when it is asked for." (p. 556D)

"26. Knowledge is possessed only by sharing; it is safeguarded by wisdom and socialized by love." (p. 557C)

"The sense or feeling of guilt is the consciousness of the violation of the mores; it is not necessarily sin. There is no real sin in the absence of conscious disloyalty to Deity.

The possibility of the recognition of the sense of guilt is a badge of transcendent distinction for mankind. It does not mark man as mean but rather sets him apart as a creature of potential greatness and ever-ascending glory. Such a sense of unworthiness is the initial stimulus that should lead quickly and surely to those faith conquests which translate the mortal mind to the superb levels of moral nobility, cosmic insight, and spiritual living; thus are all the meanings of human existence changed from the temporal to the eternal, and all values are elevated from the human to the divine.

The confession of sin is a manful repudiation of disloyalty, but it in no wise mitigates the time-space consequences of such disloyalty. But confession--sincere recognition of the nature of sin--is essential to religious growth and spiritual progress." (p. 984C)

"But if religion is to stimulate individual development of character and augment integration of personality, it must not be standardized. If it is to stimulate evaluation of experience and serve as a value-lure, it must not be stereotyped. If religion is to promote supreme loyalties, it must not be formalized." (p. 1089D)

"If you love your fellow man, you must have discovered their values. Jesus loved men so much because he placed such a high value upon them. You can best discover values in your associates by discovering their motivation. If someone irritates you, causes feelings of resentment, you should sympathetically seek to discern his viewpoint, his reasons for such objectionable conduct. If once you understand your neighbor, you will become tolerant, and this tolerance will grow into friendship and ripen into love." (p. 1098B)

"There really is a true and genuine inner voice, that "true light which lights every man who comes into the world." And this spirit leading is distinct from the ethical prompting of human conscience. The feeling of religious assurance is more than an emotional feeling. The assurance of religion transcends the reason of the mind, even the logic of philosophy. Religion is faith, trust, and assurance." (p. 1104B)

"The divine spirit makes contact with mortal man, not by feelings or emotions, but in the realm of the highest and most spiritualized thinking. It is your thoughts, not your feelings, that lead you Godward." (p. 1104D-1105A)

"Religion lives and prospers, then, not by sight and feeling, but rather by faith and insight. It consists not in the discovery of new

facts or in the finding of a unique experience but rather in the discovery of new and spiritual *meanings* in facts already well known to mankind. The highest religious experience is not dependent on prior acts of belief, tradition, and authority; neither is religion the offspring of sublime feelings and purely mystical emotions. It is, rather, a profoundly deep and actual experience of spiritual communion with the spirit influences resident within the human mind, and as far as such an experience is definable in terms of psychology, it is simply the experience of experiencing the reality of believing in God as the reality of such a purely personal experience." (p. 1105B)

"Faith never shuns the problem-solving duty of mortal living. Living faith does not foster bigotry, persecution, or intolerance." (p. 1115A)

"Do not make the mistake of judging another's religion by your own standards of knowledge and truth." (p. 1115B)

"A group of mortals can experience spiritual unity, but they can never attain philosophic uniformity." (p. 1129D)

"All men recognize the morality of this universal human urge to be unselfish and altruistic. The humanist ascribes the origin of this urge to the natural working of the material mind; the religionist more correctly recognizes that the truly unselfish drive of mortal mind is in response to the inner spirit leadings of the Thought Adjuster.

But man's interpretation of these early conflicts between the ego-will and the other-than-self-will is not always dependable. Only a fairly well unified personality can arbitrate the multiform contentions of the ego cravings and the budding social consciousness. The self has rights as well as one's neighbors. Neither has exclusive claims upon the attention and service of the individual. Failure to resolve this problem gives origin to the earliest type of human guilt feelings.

Human happiness is achieved only when the ego desire of the self and the altruistic urge of the higher self (divine spirit) are coordinated and reconciled by the unified will of the integrating and supervising personality. The mind of evolutionary man is ever confronted with the intricate problem of refereeing the contest between the natural expansion of emotional impulses and the moral

growth of unselfish urges predicated on spiritual insight--genuine religious reflection.

The attempt to secure equal good for the self and for the greatest number of other selves presents a problem which cannot always be satisfactorily resolved in a time-space frame." (p. 1134A)

"But man is not saved or ennobled by pressure. Spirit growth springs from within the evolving soul. Pressure may deform the personality but it never stimulates growth. Even educational pressure is only negatively helpful in that it may aid in the prevention of disastrous experience. Spiritual growth is greatest where all external pressures are at a minimum. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Man develops best when the pressures of home, community, church, and state are least. But this must not be construed as meaning that there is no place in a progressive society for home, social institutions, church and state." (p. 1135A)

"The security of a religious group depends on spiritual unity, not on theological uniformity. A religious group should be able to enjoy the liberty of freethinking without having to become 'freethinkers.'" (p. 1135B)

"Nothing in the entire universe can substitute for the fact of experience on nonexistential levels." (p. 1185B)

"I cannot but observe that so many of you spend so much time and thought on mere trifles of living, while you almost wholly overlook the more essential realities of everlasting import, those very accomplishments which are concerned with the development of a more harmonious working agreement between you and your Adjuster. The great goal of human existence is to attune to the divinity of the indwelling Adjuster; the great achievement of mortal life is the attainment of a true and understanding consecration to the eternal aims of the divine spirit who waits and works within your mind. But a devoted and determined effort to realize eternal destiny is wholly compatible with a light-hearted and joyous life and with a successful and honorable career on earth. Co-operation with the Thought Adjuster does not entail self-torture, mock piety, or hypocritical and ostentatious self-abasement; the ideal life is one of loving service rather than an existence of fearful apprehension." (p. 1206B)

"Sharing is Godlike--divine." (p. 1221A)

"Of all the dangers which beset man's mortal nature and jeopardize his spiritual integrity, pride is the greatest. Courage is valorous, but egotism is vainglorious and suicidal. Reasonable self-confidence is not to be deplored. Man's ability to transcend himself is the one thing which distinguishes him from the animal kingdom.

Pride is deceitful, intoxicating, and sin-breeding whether found in an individual, a group, a race, or a nation. It is literally true, "Pride goes before a fall." (p. 1223A)

To become mature is to live more intensely in the present, at the same time escaping from the limitations of the present. The plans of maturity, founded on past experience, are coming into being in the present in such manner as to enhance the values of the future." (p. 1295D)

"Many human reactions are mechanical in nature; much of life is machinelike. But man, a mechanism, is much more than a machine; he is mind endowed and spirit indwelt; and though he can never throughout his material life escape the chemical and electrical mechanics of his existence, he can increasingly learn how to subordinate this physical-life machine to the directive wisdom of experience by the process of consecrating the human mind to the execution of the spiritual urges of the indwelling Thought Adjuster." (p. 1301D)

"Jesus possessed the ability effectively to mobilize all his powers of mind, soul, and body on the task immediately in hand. He could concentrate his deep-thinking mind on the one problem which he wished to solve, and this, in connection with his untiring *patience*, enabled him serenely to endure the trials of a difficult mortal existence--to live as if he were 'seeing Him who is invisible.'" (p. 1400D-1401A)

"There was something gracious and inspiring about the personality of Jesus which invariably attracted young people. He always made them feel at ease in his presence. Perhaps his great secret in getting along with them consisted in the twofold fact that he was always interested in what they were doing, while he seldom offered them advice unless they asked for it." (p. 1420D)

"If you truly want to find God, that desire is in itself evidence that you have already found him. Your trouble is not that you cannot find God, for the Father has already found you; your trouble is simply that you do not know God." (p. 1440B)

"And this was his method of instruction: Never once did he attack their errors or even mention the flaws in their teachings. In each case he would select the truth in what they taught and then proceed so to embellish and illuminate this truth in their minds that in a very short time this enhancement of the truth effectively crowded out the associated error;" (p. 1456A)

"As a rule, to those he taught the most, he said the least. Those who derived most benefit from his personal ministry were overburdened, anxious, and dejected mortals who gained much relief because of the opportunity to unburden their souls to a sympathetic and understanding listener, and he was all that and more. And when these maladjusted human beings had told Jesus about their troubles, always was he able to offer practical and immediately helpful suggestions looking toward the correction of their real difficulties, albeit he did not neglect to speak words of present comfort and immediate consolation. And invariable would he tell these distressed mortals about the love of God and impart the information, by various and sundry methods, that they were the children of this loving Father in heaven." (p. 1460D-1461A)

"Give the milk of truth to those who are babes in spiritual perception. In your living and loving ministry serve spiritual food in attractive form and suited to the capacity of receptivity of each of your inquirers." (p. 1474B)

"In the coming kingdom, be not mindful of those things which foster your anxiety but rather at all times concern yourselves only with doing the will of the Father who is in heaven." (p. 1525D)

"Ever his exhortation to the apostles was: 'Go seek for the sinners; find the downhearted and comfort the anxious.'" (p. 1543B)

"These five months of work with Jesus led these apostles, each one of them, to regard him as the best friend he had in all the world. And it was this human sentiment, and not his superb teachings or marvelous doings, that held them together until after the

resurrection and the renewal of the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom." (p. 1546C)

"This 'son of thunder' became the 'apostle of love'; and at Ephesus, when the aged bishop was no longer able to stand in the pulpit and preach but had to be carried to church in a chair, and when at the close of the service he was asked to say a few words to the believers, for years his only utterance was, 'My little children, love one another.'" (p. 1554D)

"And it will not be so much by the words you speak as by the lives you live that men will know you have been with me and have learned of the realities of the kingdom." (p. 1569C)

"It is a great error to teach boys and young men that it is unmanly to show tenderness or otherwise to give evidence of emotional feeling or physical suffering. Sympathy is a worthy attribute of the male as well as the female. It is not necessary to be calloused in order to be manly. . . . Being sensitive and responsive to human need creates genuine and lasting happiness, while such kindly attitudes safeguard the soul from the destructive influences of anger, hate, and suspicion." (p. 1575A)

"What he aimed at in his life appears to have been a *superb self-respect*. He only advised man to humble himself that he might become truly exalted; what he really aimed at was true humility toward God. He placed great value upon sincerity--a pure heart. Fidelity was a cardinal virtue in his estimate of character, while *courage* was the very heart of his teachings. 'Fear not' was his watchword, and patient endurance his ideal of strength of character." (p. 1582B)

"Jesus knew men were different, and he so taught his apostles. He constantly exhorted them to refrain from trying to mold the disciples and believers according to some set pattern. He sought to allow each soul to develop in its own way, a perfecting and separate individual before God." (p. 1582D)

"The Master taught them much about the whole man--the union of body, mind, and spirit to form the individual man or woman." (p. 1590D)

"Many times during the training of the twelve Jesus reverted to this theme. Repeatedly he told them it was not his desire that those who believed in him should become dogmatized and standardized in accordance with the religious interpretations of even good men. Again and again he warned his apostles against the formulation of creeds and the establishment of traditions as a means of guiding and controlling believers in the gospel of the kingdom." (p. 1592A)

"When Simon Zelotes and Jesus were alone, Simon asked the Master: 'Why is it that I could not persuade him? Why did he so resist me and so readily lend an ear to you?' Jesus answered: 'Simon, Simon, how many times have I instructed you to refrain from all efforts to take something *out* of the hearts of those who seek salvation? How often have I told you to labor only to put something *into* these hungry souls? Lead men into the kingdom, and the great and living truths of the kingdom will presently drive out all serious error. When you have presented to moral man the good news that God is his Father, you can the easier persuade him that he is in reality a son of God. . . . I came not to take away that which you had from your forefathers but to show you the perfected vision of that which your fathers saw only in part. Go then, Simon, teaching and preaching the kingdom, and when you have a man safely and securely within the kingdom, then is the time, when such a one shall come to you with inquiries, to impart instruction having to do with the progressive advancement of the soul within the divine kingdom.'" (p. 1592C)

"You must realize that the best method of solving some entangled problems is to forsake them for a time." (p. 1611A)

"They had made the important discovery that many human perplexities are in reality nonexistent, that many pressing troubles are the creations of exaggerated fear and the offspring of augmented apprehension. They had learned that all such perplexities are best handled by being forsaken; by going off they had left such problems to solve themselves." (p. 1611C)

"His message was so compelling! While he made no appeal to human authority, he did speak directly to the consciences and souls of men. Though he did not resort to logic, legal quibbles, or clever sayings, he did make a powerful, direct, clear, and personal appeal to the hearts of his hearers." (p. 1632A)

"The important thing is not the rapidity of your progress but rather its certainty. Your actual achievement is not so important as the fact that the *direction* of your progress is Godward. What you are becoming day by day is of infinitely more importance than what you are today." (p. 1653A)

"To pray is natural for the children of light, but fasting is not a part of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven." (p. 1655D)

"Many of the cures effected by Jesus in connection with his ministry in behalf of Elman's patients did, indeed, appear to resemble the working of miracles, but we were instructed that they were only just such transformations of mind and spirit as may occur in the experience of expectant and faith-dominated persons who are under the immediate and inspirational influence of a strong, positive, and beneficent personality whose ministry banishes fear and destroys anxiety." (p. 1658D)

"His ear was ever open to the sorrows of mankind, and he always helped those who sought his ministry." (p. 1671A)

"He engaged in the destruction of that which *was* only when he simultaneously offered his fellows the superior thing which *ought to be*." (p. 1672A)

"Anger indicates your lack of tolerant brotherly love plus your lack of self-respect and self-control. Anger depletes the health, debases the mind, and handicaps the spirit teacher of man's soul." (p. 1673B)

"Let your hearts be so dominated by love that your spirit guide will have little trouble in delivering you from the tendency to give vent to those outbursts of animal anger which are inconsistent with the status of divine sonship." (p. 1673C)

"He called attention to the fact that any virtue, if carried to extremes, may become a vice. Jesus always preached temperance and taught consistency--proportionate adjustment of life problems. He pointed out that overmuch sympathy and pity may degenerate into serious emotional instability; that enthusiasm may drive on into fanaticism. He discussed one of their former associates whose imagination had led him off into visionary and impractical

undertakings. At the same time he warned them against the dangers of the dullness of overconservative mediocrity.

And then Jesus discoursed on the dangers of courage and faith, how they sometimes lead unthinking souls on to recklessness and presumption. He also showed how prudence and discretion, when carried too far, lead to cowardice and failure. He exhorted his hearers to strive for originality while they shunned all tendency toward eccentricity. He pleaded for sympathy without sentimentality, piety without sanctimoniousness. He taught reverence free from fear and superstition." (p. 1673C)

"Always respect the personality of man. Never should a righteous cause be promoted by force; spiritual victories can be won only by spiritual power. this injunction against the employment of material influences refers to psychic force as well as to physical force. Overpowering arguments and mental superiority are not to be employed to coerce men and women into the kingdom. Man's mind is not to be crushed by the mere weight of logic or overawed by shrewd eloquence. While emotion as a factor in human decisions cannot be wholly eliminated, it should not be directly appealed to in the teachings of those who would advance the cause of the kingdom. Make your appeals directly to the divine spirit that dwells within the minds of men. Do not appeal to fear, pity, or mere sentiment. . . .

In bringing men into the kingdom, do not lessen or destroy their self-respect." (p. 1765)

"Of all the sorrows of a trusting man, none is so terrible as to be 'wounded in the house of a trusted friend.'" (p. 1677A)

"You see, my children, the appeal to human feelings is transitory and utterly disappointing; the exclusive appeal to the intellect of man is likewise empty and barren; it is only by making your appeal to the spirit which lives within the human mind that you can hope to achieve lasting success and accomplish those marvelous transformations of human character that are presently shown in the abundant yielding of the genuine fruits of the spirit in the daily lives of all who are thus delivered from the darkness of doubt by the birth of the spirit into the light of faith--the kingdom of heaven." (p. 1705C)

"Jesus fully understood how men prepare themselves for the decisions of a crisis and the performance of sudden deeds of

courageous choosing by the slow process of the reiterated choosing between the recurring situations of good and evil. He subjected his chosen messengers to repeated rehearsals in disappointment and provided them with frequent and testing opportunities for choosing between the right and the wrong way of meeting spiritual trials. He knew he could depend on his followers, when they met the final test, to make their vital decisions in accordance with prior and habitual mental attitudes and spirit reactions." (p. 1708B)

"The most effective of all social groups is the family, more particularly the *two parents*. Personal affection is the spiritual bond which holds together these material associations. Such an effective relationship is also possible between two persons of the same sex, as is so abundantly illustrated in the devotions of genuine friendship.

These associations of friendship and mutual affection are socializing and ennobling because they encourage and facilitate the following essential factors of the higher levels of the art of living:

1. *Mutual self-expression and self-understanding*. Many noble human impulses die because there is no one to hear their expression. Truly, it is not good for man to be alone. . . .

2. *Union of souls* - the mobilization of wisdom. Every human being sooner or later acquires a certain concept of this world and a certain vision of the next. Now it is possible, through personality association, to unite these views of temporal existence and eternal prospects. Thus does the mind of one augment its spiritual values by gaining much of the insight of the other. In this way men enrich the soul by pooling their respective spiritual possessions. Likewise, in this same way man is enabled to avoid that ever-present tendency to fall victim to distortion of vision, prejudice of viewpoint and narrowness of judgment. Fear, envy, and conceit can be prevented only by intimate contact with other minds. I call your attention to the fact that the Master never sends you out alone to labor for the extension of the kingdom he always sends you out two and two. And since wisdom is superknowledge, it follows that, in the union of wisdom, the social group, small or large, mutually shares all knowledge.

3. *The enthusiasm for living*. Isolation tends to exhaust the energy charge of the soul. Association with one's fellows is essential to the renewal of the zest for life and is indispensable to the maintenance of the courage to fight those battles consequent upon the ascent to the higher levels of human living. Friendship enhances the joys and glorifies the triumphs of life. Loving and intimate human associations tend to rob suffering of its sorrow and hardship

of much of its bitterness. The presence of a friend enhances all beauty and exalts every goodness. By intelligent symbols man is able to quicken and enlarge the appreciative power and possibility of the mutual stimulation of the imagination. Great spiritual power is inherent in the consciousness of wholehearted devotion to a common cause, mutual loyalty to a cosmic Deity.

4. *The enhanced defense against all evil.* Personality association and mutual affection is an efficient insurance against evil. Difficulties, sorrow, disappointment, and defeat are more painful and disheartening when born alone. Association does not transmute evil into righteousness, but it does aid in greatly lessening the sting. Said your Master, 'Happy are they who mourn'--if a friend is at hand to comfort. There is positive strength in the knowledge that you live for the welfare of others, and that these others likewise live for your welfare and advancement. Man languishes in isolation. Human beings unfailingly become discouraged when they view only the transitory transactions of time. The present, when divorced from the past and the future, becomes exasperatingly trivial. Only a glimpse of the circle of eternity can inspire man to do his best and can challenge the best in him to do its utmost. And when man is thus at his best, he lives most unselfishly for the good of others, his fellow sojourners in time and eternity.

I repeat, such inspiring and ennobling association finds its ideal possibilities in the human marriage relation. True, much is attained out of marriage, and many, many marriages utterly fail to produce these moral and spiritual fruits. . . . And thus, if you can build up such trustworthy and effective small units of human association, when these are assembled in the aggregate, the world will behold a great and glorified social structure, the civilization of mortal maturity. Such a race might begin to realize something of your Master's ideal of 'peace on earth and good will among men.' While such a society would not be perfect or entirely free from evil it would at least approach the stabilization of maturity." (p. 1775D-1777B)

"Jesus was never in a hurry. He had time to comfort his fellow men 'as he passed by.' And he always made his friends feel at ease. He was a charming listener. He never engaged in the meddlesome probing of the souls of his associates. As he comforted hungry minds and ministered to thirsty souls, the recipients of his mercy did not so much feel that they were confessing to him as that they were

conferring *with* him. They had unbounded confidence in him because they saw he had so much faith in them.

He never seemed to be curious about people, and he never manifested a desire to direct, manage, or follow them up. He inspired profound self-confidence and robust courage in all who enjoyed his association. When he smiled on a man, that mortal experience increased capacity for solving his manifold problems.

Jesus loved men so much and so wisely that he never hesitated to be severe with them when the occasion demanded such discipline. He frequently set out to help a person by asking for help. In this way he elicited interest, appealed to the better things in human nature.

. . . Great things happened not only because people had faith in Jesus, but also because Jesus had so much faith in them.

Most of the really important things which Jesus said or did seemed to happen casually, 'as he passed by.' There was so little of the professional, the well-planned, or the premeditated in the Master's earthly ministry. He dispensed health and scattered happiness naturally and gracefully as he journeyed through life. It was literally true, 'He went about doing good.'

And it behooves the Master's followers in all ages to learn to minister as 'they pass by'--to do unselfish good as they go about their daily duties." (p. 1874C-1875B)

"Through the vicissitudes of life, remember always to love one another. Do not strive with men, even with unbelievers. Show mercy even to those who spitefully abuse you." (p. 1932B)

"The impulse of friendship transcends all convictions of duty, and the service of a friend for a friend can never be called a sacrifice." (p. 1945B)

"This experience of losing self and finding the spirit was not one of emotion; it was an act of intelligent self-surrender and unreserved consecration." (p. 2065C)

"Unmistakably, a new fellowship was arising in the world. 'The multitude who believed continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.' They called each other brother and sister; they greeted one another with a holy kiss; they ministered to the poor. It was a fellowship of living as well as of worship. They were not communal by decree but by the desire to share their goods with their fellow believers. They

confidently expected that Jesus would return to complete the establishment of the Father's kingdom during their generation. This spontaneous sharing of earthly possessions was not a direct feature of Jesus' teaching; it came about because these men and women so sincerely and so confidently believed that he was to return any day to finish his work and to consummate the kingdom. But the final results of this well-meant experiment in thoughtless brotherly love were disastrous and sorrow-breeding. Thousands of earnest believers sold their property and disposed of all their capital goods and other productive assets. With the passing of time, the dwindling resources of Christian 'equal-sharing' came to an *end*--but the world did not. Very soon the believers at Antioch were taking up a collection to keep their fellow believers at Jerusalem from starving." (p. 2067B)

"Truth often becomes confusing and even misleading when it is dismembered, segregated, isolated, and too much analyzed. Living truth teaches the truth seeker aright only when it is embraced in wholeness and as a living spiritual reality, not as a fact of material science or an inspiration of intervening art." (p. 2075C)

"The mind of man can attain high levels of spiritual insight and corresponding spheres of divinity of values because it is not wholly material. There is a spirit nucleus in the mind of man--the Adjuster of the divine presence. There are three separate evidences of this spirit indwelling of the human mind:

1. Humanitarian fellowship--love. The purely animal mind may be gregarious for self-protection, but only the spirit-indwelt intellect is unselfishly altruistic and unconditionally loving.

2. Interpretation of the universe--wisdom. Only the spirit-indwelt mind can comprehend that the universe is friendly to the individual.

3. Spiritual evaluation of life--worship. Only the spirit-indwelt man can realize the divine presence and seek to attain a fuller experience in and with this foretaste of divinity." (p. 2094B)