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- *True sharing and what impedes it*

God elevates each of you to a level of understanding that permits sharing and allows much opportunity for listening. It is remarkable how little one does share with another. Human beings are generally most protective. There is a defensiveness that constantly covers attitudes and actions. Human beings are quick to criticize but slow to share.

It is easy to be critical of someone else's actions. It is infinitely more difficult to open one's self to the possible criticism by others. Being vulnerable is not a natural characteristic for anyone. True sharing is the ability to be vulnerable. It is not the ability to judge or to provide answers constantly. When you share, you are in truth reaching out for help.

Why is this so difficult? Why is it that it is easier to give help than to ask for it? Giving help always affirms one's sense of personal value, personal power, personal influence. Asking for help implies the need for assistance, the inability to be totally self-sufficient. Asking for help admits being insufficient to the task.

Admitting insufficiency, contrary to the beliefs of many, is not admitting weakness. It is not a fault to ask for help. It is not a fault or a weakness to be vulnerable. You are vulnerable, and it is the fear that comes with vulnerability that motivates the need for self-assurance, the need to promote one's position of security. This vulnerability means that one spends great effort building the walls that hide that vulnerability. Your ability to share is directly related to your willingness to allow those walls to be transparent, to no longer hold at bay the judgments of others that may reinforce a sense of inadequacy. Real sharing is allowing that vulnerability to come through. It is also the recognition that all are vulnerable.

When you share with one another in this group, you bring to the discussion your anxieties, your frustrations and fears. You are not bringing your sense of wisdom, but your sense of need. Certainly in the sharing there is no problem in speaking of your beliefs or your views. It is one thing to express one's views in an attempt to reach out to provide comfort or assurance. It is something quite different to assert your views as being the solutions of value beyond others.

Sharing is recognizing your vulnerability even when you may have ideas that will help another. It is the admission that your ideas may not be the best or the only solutions, but they are offered in a spirit of love and compassion in the desire to reach out and affect another person's life. Such offering within the framework of vulnerability and an admission of imperfection is essential to real sharing, substantive sharing, substantive giving as well as receiving. You should not shy away from opportunities that reflect your vulnerability, your imperfection.

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It is, in the end, pride that blocks this vulnerability. It is pride that prevents you from accepting your own imperfections and it is the need for judgment that prevents you from accepting the imperfections of others. By accepting your own shortcomings, by recognizing and admitting those parts of your life that could be helped by another, then you begin the process of truly accepting another person without judgment, without a question of that person's true value, without a sense of superiority. You become involved in the growth of another, the joy of another, the healing of another, the peace of another. To accomplish that, you must accept your own inadequacies.

No one feels perfect in all respects. No one who is at all reflective, no one who has a slightest sense of what reality is will ever assert with firm belief, infallibility. Yet by not admitting it, not acting upon that imperfection, you prevent yourselves from sharing. You prevent yourselves from growing through the efforts of others.

You are not the only source of your own nourishment. You are nourished by others as we have mentioned so many times before. But that nourishment is enhanced when you are willing to accept your imperfections. Just as you are more able to hear God when you quiet your own chatter, you cannot expect to receive when you are constantly transmitting. You must allow the systems to become neutral. You cannot accept the help of others unless you are willing to accept the need for that help.

When others express their concerns and worries, it is important for you to recognize that they are admitting their vulnerability, their inability to totally cope with the challenges at hand. Allow yourselves an opportunity to interact with compassion, to respond responsibly, responsibly to the call for help. You must allow yourselves more chance for a response, your response, the other side of vulnerability—compassion. It is difficult to respond if you are consumed by the activity of self-assertion, the need for dominance, the need to be right, the need for complete control. All of these prevent you from being responsive.

Pull away from your sense of importance, intelligence, control, dominance in one form or another. Avoid being insistent upon something happening. You may create an environment in which that for which you pray indeed comes to pass, but you must not push your agenda, push your sense of direction upon another with dominance as a by-product.

The highest ability to give in the sharing equation is demonstrated when such giving is offered with no conditions, with no pre-set expectations of response to that giving. When you give love to another, you must expect nothing in return. You must demand nothing in return. You cannot give love when there are strings of expectation associated with that gift, for such expectations emphasize dominance. Sharing as a giver means letting go with no sense of what will come your way.

Sharing when you ask for help is experienced when there is no direct expectation of what will be forthcoming. If you share with a sense of need accompanied by an insistence of what you must receive from the experience, there is no sharing. If

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you share because this is who you are, these are the needs that you have, these are the inadequacies that you feel, you lay that sharing upon the table. There is nothing more that you can expect, for that sharing is being done in a spirit of trust, not in a spirit of wanting something. You trust in the sharing because you trust you will not be judged.

If you receive something in return for that sharing, that is of course fine and should not be resented. But such sharing is only valuable when its purpose is to express where you are on your journey, period. No demand for road maps, no demand for instructions. When those instructions, when those road maps are provided, you receive them with gratitude and not with the belief that it is a response to your expectations or demands. Sharing, therefore, has no demands, it has no expectations. It is offered through complete trust.

Your response in a sharing environment when needs are expressed can also be given with no firm belief whether or not what you give will be received. If someone asks for advice and you present it, you share because that is your perspective, not because you expect that person to accept what you are offering. You give because that is who you are. What you share by giving is placed on the table. Whether it is picked up is not of concern to you. You are giving because that is your nature to give. You are asking for help because that is your nature to ask. The asking and the giving are both done in a spirit of loving trust. That is what sharing is in a loving environment. That environment can be between two people or a group. Love is offered and love is received through trust. Sharing is a way of exchanging that love or relationship in a meaningful way, and it is that sharing that serves as evidence of God's presence in the relationship.

God is not self-defensive. God is not concerned by image or appearance or expectations. God's presence is a patient presence, and your presence in a sharing relationship must also be so patient. It is through that patience that one learns to be compassionate. The teacher who is patient with the student can grow to be a compassionate teacher. The teacher who is demanding of a student, expecting specific results in a certain way, does not demonstrate compassion. It is good for all, of course, to have ideals—what one stands for, what one hopes others stand for. It is fine to recognize those ideals, those standards, and it is fine to demonstrate your sense of the value of those standards, the worth that they are in your life, but you cannot dominate another by insisting that those standards be met before a loving relationship and a trusting relationship can be formed.

Compassion grows out of trust; it does not grow out of expectations. Sharing grows out of trust; it does not grow out of expectations. The key concept here is to eliminate expectations, but be willing to share where you are as a receiver and as a giver. The other side of the equation from where you stand is out of your control.

Allow yourselves the ability to share who you are. Allow yourselves the risk of trusting in the response of another. Bring into that trusting relationship the quality of forgiveness, for that trust is frequently broken. Without forgiveness there is bitterness,

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and with bitterness there is fear. When fear is present there is no sharing, there is no trust. There is only rivalry, jealousy, anger. Such relationships can only be negative.

You are challenged, therefore, to establish relationships built on the positive, on that trust, allowing compassion and vulnerability to be equal participants in the sharing relationship. When one shares, one gets hurt, but without the risk, there is no gain. No deeper relationships are formed without the risk of pain, without the risk of misunderstanding.

God's presence in your lives affirms your value as human beings, regardless of the pain and misunderstanding that may come your way from your sharing. You are always in God's presence, you are always in God's light, you are always in God's care. Allow yourselves to be open to God's presence. Allow yourselves to be open to that presence as expressed by others responding to you. Allow yourselves to be open to God's presence in your response to others.

We pray for your openness. Bring in the light! Bring in the love!

Amen.