

February 4, 1985

- *Endurance breeds character*
- *All are equal in God's eyes*

God is with you, with each of you, and blesses your lives richly beyond your own awareness.

The sharing which took place tonight actually serves many functions. It has enabled each of you to offer a part of yourselves to the group. It has helped you to organize your own individual feelings even as you expressed them. But it should also serve as a means by which you recognize your own development.

It is important certainly to be in touch with the difficulties you may encounter in life. It is also important to realize the progress that you make through your lives for your lives are not static. Your lives are constantly changing. They do not consist merely of progress. More important, your lives consist of solutions. You alone endure difficulties, but in that statement are two truths: one, difficulties; two, endure—endure because you come through them, you deal with them, you live with them, and you continue. The ability to endure is a gift from God.

There are so many who feel they cannot endure, that somehow there is no end. This is such a great tragedy because God provides the means to endure, to get through. All of you are getting through. All of you are enduring. All of you are able to get beyond what is difficult in life. For each of you, life presents different challenges, but you all share in common the potential to get through.

Unfortunately, at times you forget that ability. It is easy to get caught up in difficulties, in frustrations—the agony of knowing where you are as opposed to where you wish to be. In recognition of the gap, as you say, and in losing sight of this God-given ability to continue to work through and to endure, you are letting concerns mold your reactions to life. It is not the difficulties of life which mold your path on earth. It is what you make of that which forms the character of your very existence. It is how you deal. It is how you endure.

In the history of the Christian religion, in the end the study of Jesus is not a study of what he did in life. It is more valuable to subsequent generations to know how he reacted to what was endured. The account of forgiveness at the end is more important as a matter or issue to be learned by all than all of the reported miracles that took place, for they are ultimately of little value. It is how life was coped with. It is how the end of life was coped with—what was made of the final agony.

And so it is with your lives. You must allow your lives to be given character by what you make of experiences—how you get through them. You must never let the experiences, the difficulties, the frustrations govern the nature of your lives, for those are different for everyone.

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Is someone's life more valuable because more money was earned, more travel was achieved, more fame was received? Does that really matter? Is that person's life more valuable because of those things than another's life in which accomplishments in a worldly sense were less? Of course not, you know that. Those experiences of one person's life in comparison with another are vastly different.

What is important in both lives is the necessity at times to get through, to endure, to persevere. That is shared by all people, young or old, rich or poor, advantaged or disadvantaged. All face in life challenges which must be dealt with, whether of world-shaking importance or merely of personal significance. One still is forced to respond to that which occurs in life creating frustration or anxiety, anger, remorse.

So in a real sense, all lives are really equal because all face such challenges at times. All challenges give faith, give character to the human experience of life on earth. It is your growing awareness of God which serves as an anchor or stabilizer, enabling you to endure, and through enduring and dealing with life, to grow closer to God.

The sharing which each of you offered has with it a sense of coming through an experience. The experiences were occasionally of moderate duration, occasionally of great duration. But nevertheless all have been affected by some aspect of their lives, and it is in the sharing of how one responds to life that another learns both the meaning and value of life.

What one of you shared tonight was very difficult. The implications of those difficulties rest not just on her life but on each of you. For although the details may differ, you all experience the frustration of feeling a rejection at times, a sense of inadequacy, a sense of questioning: "What can I do? Why does this happen?" The courage with which she approaches her concerns should serve as an example for all. We emphasize courage for she has not found the solution but continues the search. It doesn't take courage to succeed; it takes courage to try. What you do in life must be surrounded with faith and courage: faith that somehow God is in this with you, and courage to persevere toward your chosen goals, be they reconciliation, inner peace, understanding—understanding of God, understanding of siblings, understanding of life, understanding of oneself.

We mention the understanding of oneself at the end because ultimately it is the most difficult. We try to understand others, but your contact with others can only be through your own perception. Your understanding of others is a reflection whose light is transmitted through your understanding of yourself. When self-understanding is limited, the reflection diminishes that light, and it is more difficult to understand others. Self-understanding is both the first and toughest goal to be reached for all. It takes more than a lifetime to understand oneself. Indeed, God often provides additional lifetimes for such growth.

Those who have a strong understanding of others have that information because of the heightened clarity of vision of self. There is no connection between self-

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understanding and ego. We do not imply that to understand oneself is to feel that one is more important. If anything, those who have stronger understanding of self have a very weak sense of self-importance, in your sense of the word. Self-value, yes, for all are valuable. Self-importance, no, for no one individual is more important than another.

The perpetrator of a crime is no less important than the highest law official of the land. Both are virtually equal. Both have souls. Both are an integral part of God, and both must be the subject for the offering of love. This is very difficult both to explain and to accept. You may understand in theory that all are equal, but to accept in practice that all human beings are absolutely equal in God's eyes is difficult. It is difficult because you are then challenged to accept the fact that if all are equal in God's eyes, they therefore should be equal in your eyes.

How many times do you feel: "Well, that's God's problem, but I can't handle that." It happens all the time. "Well, let God feel they are equal. I don't." That is very common. Rare is the person who loves the sinner as much as the saint, but that is your job, too. It is to love all, but you cannot love all fully without loving yourselves, having self-respect, if you choose to call it that. An individual with no self-respect, with no sense of self-value or worth cannot be open to love another on a completely meaningful level.

Although none of you will ever in this life fully achieve a complete sense of self-awareness, self-knowledge, you can all nevertheless give yourselves credit for being who you are, for living the life you chose to lead. It was your choice. What you did and what you continue to do with your life has been and will be your choice. Recognize and accept the fact that you all have achieved much. You all continue to grow despite difficulties, despite frustrations or an awareness of a gap between where you are and where you hope to be. Despite all of that, you continue to grow. You grow spiritually. You continue to deepen in the manner in which you engage the world about you. You continue to find more understanding of the meaning of your life.

That is all positive. That is all because God has given you the framework within which you may grow, and you have chosen to grow. All of that is positive. All of that is indicative of God's response to your life as an individual and your response to God as the creator, as the provider, as the challenger, as the nourisher, as the comforter, as the peace-maker. You respond to God in ways provided to you by God. Were it not for God now in your lives, you could not respond. Your lives would not be what they are.

If you feel you have not succeeded, perhaps you should change the way by which you measure your life. If you attempt to measure the distance between two planets, you do not use a yardstick. It is the wrong tool. There is no way that with such an apparatus you can appreciate the distance between two foreign bodies. If you feel your lives are not what you want them to be, perhaps you should be willing to look at your lives from a different perspective and by so doing, you may recognize that your lives are indeed stronger, richer, and more fulfilled.

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When you feel you are alone, seek out someone whom you perceive to be really alone. If you feel ill, seek out another who is desperately ill. If you feel discouraged, seek out another who is deeply depressed. You have the capacity to help in each of these conditions, and you will also recognize that there are many more who experience greater misfortune than you. You will return from an experience like that with a greater sensitivity to the sufferings of others and to the blessings you receive so abundantly.

Life at times certainly seems unfair. There are those who appear to have great abundance and others who suffer a life of apparent destitution. How can this be if all are loved by God equally? This is a major question which we shall explore in considerable detail at another time. But it is important for you to realize that despite these seeming disparities, those lives are not unequal but virtually the same. The trappings may be different, but their essence is identical.

As you continue with your daily activities, be open to the recognition that you are growing steadily toward God. Be willing to recognize that your lives are shaped by what you make of them and not by what happens to them. You are the captain of your own ship. The sea has been provided by God, the weather perhaps determined by God, but how you use the forces of the sea and the air above is your responsibility. And by looking back even a short distance you confirm your forward progress not in terms of speed but direction. As we have said so often, it is not how fast you come to God, it is only that you come to God. Speed is unimportant. Direction is all important.

We rejoice in the direction of your lives. We rejoice in the opportunities that God provides for you to respond, and we are filled with joy for every moment you spend together contemplating God's place in your lives and allowing us to serve as your guides. We bestow upon all of you God's many blessings and loving warmth.

Amen.