

Optional Study Suggestions for Chapter 5, “The New Dispensation of Prayer,” in *The Art of Spiritual Living*

As you work with a chapter, ideas for your own study and practice will probably come to you. Sometimes it is helpful to see what came to others in their work with the chapter, and it is in the simple spirit of sharing that we offer these ideas for study and practice for you to use or not, as you are led.

1. Key Points in the Chapter

In studying any chapter or recording, it can be helpful to pull out the key points and put them into your own words. This can bring the essential message of the chapter or recording into stark relief and help us see how we can practice the message. Joel called this “picking out the pearls” so that we can live with them and apply them “because,” he said, “that IS our study.”

For example, in Chapter 5, these are the key points that stood out for us:

- Spiritual consciousness cannot be **added** to a human, material consciousness. We have to die to, or release, our human selfhood in order to come into spiritual consciousness. Dying to the personal self is not easy; it takes effort, study, and discipline.
- To follow and demonstrate the spiritual life, we have to attain the ability to be so quiet that we can hear the “still, small voice” and receive impartations from within. True prayer is what flows from God to man, and we are praying only when we are receiving in quietness and stillness, not when we are thinking or speaking.
- Contemplative meditation helps us prepare for prayer. The words and thoughts in contemplation do not reach God, but they help to quiet us and remind us of the nature of prayer: I am the one to be enlightened, instructed, and influenced, not God.
- Never forget that the God to whom we are praying is **within us**. In prayer, we are attuned to **the center of our own being**, the mystical *I*, our true identity and Selfhood.
- We are at the spiritual level when this Presence within is flowing out into our lives in active expression. In some measure we have the experience, “*I live, yet not I. Christ is living my life.*” But this Grace cannot operate if we are busy with words and thoughts. There must be stillness and quietness, a listening attitude.
- There are things we can do to prepare ourselves for prayer. For one, Jesus taught that our prayers are of no value if we are entertaining thoughts of hate, anger, jealousy, bigotry, fear, or malice toward anyone. But the way to rid ourselves of such negative emotions is not by trying to change our thinking from wrong thinking to right thinking. It is to *consciously recognize* that there is only one God, only one Self, and that one Self is the Self of **every** individual. With this recognition, we see that what we do or do not do to another, we do or do not do to ourselves. The nature of God is love, and the more we can be attuned to love, the more receptive we are to the voice of God.

- Judging by appearances, there are those whom we cannot believe are one with God. But we cannot leave anyone out, because if something is spiritually true, it is **universally** true. They may not be aware of their true identity, but our recognition of it helps bring it into expression in them. This is how we “pray for our enemies”—we recognize the truth of their being. When I know another as he truly is, peace is established between us.

2. Some Possible Ideas for Practice

Again, ideas for your own practice will probably come to you as you read and study the chapter. We share these simply as examples. Whether the ideas come from within you or from these suggestions, it is often more effective to focus on just one or two that most appeal to you.

Prayer in the New Dispensation

- The chapter is about prayer and how to prepare ourselves for prayer. So the obvious practice is to work with Joel’s recommendations for preparing for prayer and to practice prayer in the way it is described in the chapter.

In the book *Leave Your Nets*, there is a beautiful quotation that captures the essence of Joel’s description of prayer in our study chapter. It makes a fine beginning for prayer:

“I sit in the silence in sweet communion with the gentle presence that is already within my own being.”

That’s it. Nothing to do. Nothing to think. Nothing to say. Just rest in the Presence.

With respect to the listening attitude that we are to have in prayer, it can be helpful to notice that this is an attitude that we understand and practice in other areas of our lives. It is not something new that we have to learn. For example, when you are watching a movie or a TV program, or attending a concert performance, do you talk during the performance or do you just listen? If you are absorbed in the performance, are you busy with thinking your own thoughts about other things, or are you just watching and listening?

Dying to Material Consciousness

- Joel says that to come into spiritual consciousness, we have to die to material consciousness. It is interesting to ask ourselves the question, “How do I die to material consciousness? It is also interesting to ask the question in reverse, “What keeps me in material consciousness?” Asking the question in reverse can give us ideas about what we can do to help ourselves release material consciousness.

Living Your Christhood

- Joel also talks about letting the Christ of my being live my life. Again we can ask, “How can I do this?” If we are not yet at the point where we can immediately just “be” in that state, it can be helpful in any situation to ask ourselves, “What would a Jesus (or another spiritually perfected master) do in this situation? How would he / she hold his? How would she / he handle this?”

Contemplative Meditation

- Joel talks about the value of contemplative meditation as a preparation for prayer, and he gives an example of contemplative meditation on page 73. Joel has suggested that if a subject for contemplation does not come to us right away, we can simply use the question “What is God?” or we can use a verse from Scripture, or we can read in a book until something catches our attention, and then contemplate that.

Recognizing the True Identity of Others

- In speaking about preparation for prayer, Joel emphasizes the importance of recognizing the true identity of every individual as well as our relationship of oneness. We can ask ourselves, “How can I practice recognition with everyone with whom I come in contact?” meaning not only those we contact in person, but those who come into our awareness through television, radio, news feeds, and other media. Many individuals whom we do not know personally come into our conscious awareness every day, and some may be those with whom we strongly disagree, or whom we might humanly consider to be “enemies.”

For example, today the politics in many countries is very polarized and tribal, and sometimes we can be tempted to get swept up in that behavior and to judge or condemn certain individuals. But this is an opportunity to practice recognizing the true identity of those with whom we disagree. In doing so, we can help ourselves and help others greatly.

- One of the “Eight Most Important Chapters” that Joel identified in *The Infinite Way* writings is “Love Thy Neighbor,” in *Practicing the Presence*. When we studied that chapter, we provided an excerpt from one of Joel’s classes, in which he gave us a wonderful technique for discovering and acknowledging the Son of God in others and raising up the Christ in them. We highly recommend that you revisit that document by [clicking here](#). While Joel initially describes this practice using family as an example, it is easily generalized.
- If the practice of recognition remains challenging for you with specific individuals, we recommend reading Chapter 16, “That You May Be the Children of Your Father” in *The Thunder of Silence*. That chapter is an excellent clarification and elaboration on the practice of recognition set forth in our current study chapter.