

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD - NUMBER FIFTEEN
TALKING TO GOD AS A FRIEND

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"Talking to God as a Friend"--Another look at the meaning and purpose of prayer--in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God.

If, as Jesus said, our Heavenly Father knows what our needs are even before we ask Him, what is the purpose of taking time to pray at all? This assumes, of course, that the primary purpose of prayer is to lodge our requests with God. But some prefer to understand prayer as conversation with God as with a Friend. Remember how Abraham and Moses talked to God, and God called them His friends. Remember how boldly but reverently Job agonized with God--to the consternation of Job's friends--and God was honored with his confidence. Truly the way we pray reveals the kind of Person we believe our God to be.

If the Father were to appear visibly among us, how would we address Him? What language would we use? Would we be too afraid to speak? Would we feel constrained to mention only the most lofty themes, or would we be free to talk candidly about what He already knows is in our hearts? Would it be easier to discuss such matters with the Son? Would it be more appropriate to speak or listen? How does one listen to the voice of God? And at the end of such a special meeting, would we feel that we ought to close the conversation with a "word of prayer"? Or would it be correct to realize that in talking to God as a Friend, we have been praying all along?

Some day when we really see Him face to face, will that be the end of prayer? Is prayer yet another of God's emergency measures to keep open the lines of communication with His children until there is no need to talk together anymore? What do we mean when we sing, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer"?

Welcome to the fifteenth of our conversations about God--another look at our Heavenly Father in the larger setting of the great controversy over his character and government. The topic for our fifteenth conversation is **"Talking to God as a Friend"**--another opportunity to consider the meaning and purpose of prayer. As with all the topics in our conversations, the way we pray depends upon the kind of Person we believe our God to be.

Surely no one knew God better and no one knew better how to talk to God than the Son of God Himself, the one we call Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, you recall, He gave some very clear advice as to how to pray. That is our first verse for this topic. Matthew 6:9-15 (NEB), says, "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers...for everyone to see them...But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place...In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard...Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him. This is how you should pray: `Our Father in heaven, thy name be hallowed; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one'".

But now, if as Jesus said, God already knows our needs before we ask Him, why should we take time to pray at all? This assumes that the primary purpose of prayer is to lodge our requests with the Lord. But there are others who prefer to understand prayer as conversation with God as with a Friend. It is in the biblical record that the Son of God Himself engaged in many such conversations with His Father. Just to note a few places, in Matthew 14:23 (RSV). "He went up into the hills by himself to pray."--often at the end of a very busy day. Luke adds in Luke 6:12 (RSV), "All night he continued in prayer to God". Have you ever prayed all night? How could Jesus pray to His Father all night long without a certain amount of repetition? Do you think Jesus babbled on like the heathen supposing that the more He said the more likely His Father was to hear Him? That would be inconceivable wouldn't it? Or is it that His conversations with His Father were so real that the night hours simply slipped away? Haven't you had the experience of visiting with a friend of whom you are especially fond, and the hours just fly away? You see, everything just depends, of course, on whether or not God is our Friend. I believe, that the way we pray reveals to others and to ourselves, the kind of Person we believe and understand our God to be.

So now, imagine that the Father appears visibly among us here at Loma Linda this evening. How would we speak to Him? Or to make it more personal, let us say that He is willing to meet us in the fellowship room. As many of us as could, would go over there and gather around Him, just as the crowds did around Jesus--and Mary loved to sit there at His feet. Supposing we should have the inestimable privilege of talking there freely with God the Father for a whole hour. Would it be appropriate at the end for someone of us to arise and say, "This has been such a special occasion, don't you think we ought to close this meeting with a word of prayer?" Or would it be correct to understand that talking, having conversation with our God as with a Friend for that whole hour, actually **is** real prayer, and we have been praying the whole hour long.

Or could we only converse so freely with Jesus the Son? Is it even thinkable that we could converse with the Father, the awesome One as with a friend? You remember the disciples wondered about this. They were comfortable with Jesus and how He had impressed them by saying that He wanted them to regard themselves as His friends. He said this more than once. One place is John 15:15 (RSV), "I have called you friends." They loved that so much that it prompted Philip to say, "Could the Father be like you?" And you remember Jesus' answer; we have looked at this on more than one previous occasion. Jesus said in John 14:7,9 (NIV), "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Marvelous as that is, I think much of our theology and worship fails to recognize that magnificent truth--to know the Son is to know the Father.

That is why Jesus went on to say those stunning words, hardly ever incorporated into even Christian theology, "there is no need for me to pray the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself." This time I have chosen Goodspeed's translation. Look at John 16:26 (Goodspeed). "I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, (for the following reason) for the Father loves you himself." (Parentheses supplied)

How hard it has been for God to convince us that He really is our Friend. Centuries ago when He came to speak to the people on Mount Sinai, remember that they were so terrified that they said to Moses, "Don't let God speak to us, lest we die." (Ex. 20:19)

But, Moses stood there among all the thunder and lightning and said to the people, "There is no need to be afraid." (v. 20) You see all those centuries before Christ, Moses already understood the truth that John wrote near the end of the first century after Christ in 1 John 4:18 (GNB). "There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear...fear has to do with punishment." (GNB)

If you were ushered right now into the presence of God, would you be afraid He might hurt you? Or hit you? Do you trust Him with His almighty power? You see, truly, the way we approach God some day--and everyone of us will--will reveal the kind of Person we have been persuaded our God really is.

And so, knowing all that we do and the things we have talked about in our conversation series, let us go back with renewed courage to the fellowship room. God is there waiting for us to come. Whether it be Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, it should make no difference to us. For all Three are on our side, as Paul said in Romans 8. All three are our Friends. Now as we walk into the room, we know that God **is** the all-powerful Creator of the whole vast universe. We know that the mighty angels, sinless as they are, stand overwhelmed with awe and wonder at the majesty and glory of our God. Yet, though that all be true, if we are afraid to go in, then God has failed to convince us of the truth about Himself. Jesus has failed to convince us not just with His words, but with what He has demonstrated to be true when He was here--that God is infinitely powerful, but equally gracious, and there is no need to be afraid. How could we turn down what He has paid such a price to reveal? So overwhelmed with awe, we venture to go inside.

Now God is seated there and we are gathered around Him. What should we say? Should we be the first to speak? Once we have started speaking, would we talk all the time? Or, would we let God speak for a while? Normally, when we pray we do all the talking, and then we say Amen, and go about our business or go to sleep. It would be like meeting in the room with our Heavenly Father, and talking to Him incessantly for several minutes, and then saying, "Amen, thank You very much", and then going home. It wouldn't make sense if He were there, would it? It certainly wouldn't be conversation as with a friend. Conversation means at least two people speaking.

But how do we converse with a God which we cannot see just now, because of the present emergency. We all understand that emergency and why in mercy He does not reveal Himself visibly to us at this moment. The Bible is called the Word of God--God speaking to us. If we wish to hear God speak, except in most extraordinary occasions, God speaks to us through the Bible. We speak to Him in prayer. Truly, as someone has said, "We commune with God through the study of the Scriptures." (see ML 27; DA 70)

I certainly find prayer much more meaningful after I have done some reading in the Bible. Let me say that better: I find prayer much more meaningful *while* reading the Bible. Have you ever had the experience of talking to God while reading certain parts of the Scriptures? Or for some of us, while reading the last few chapters of *Desire of Ages*. Have you ever found yourself saying out loud, "That is magnificent!?" Who are you talking to? But that is real conversation. We read, we listen, and then we talk back to God.

So once again, back to the fellowship room. There our heavenly Father waits and we begin to speak. What language should we use? Should we look at our Heavenly Father respectfully in the face, and say, "We prithee Lord that Thou wouldst bestow unctions upon us from on high?"

I think He would smile so sweetly and say, "Please relax, you can talk a little more plainly, if you wish." Unless, of course, you are used to talking that way all the time. Does everyone here know what an "unction" is? I think some think it is something tasty to eat. But did the disciples talk to God that way? Did Moses? Did Abraham? No, they all used up-to-date modern speech. They wanted to be clear. It was the language of their times.

So, I believe, if we began to speak to God, we surely would be reverent, and yet, we would be conversing with a Friend and we should use appropriate language. But this is a personal matter. Conversation with a friend--who could dictate how that should be? But surely we would use the best possible language that we could to make clear our convictions, our feelings, our desires, our admirations and our worship as we converse with our Heavenly Father, as with a friend. So, what language would we use?

Then, how would we address Him? Jesus addressed His Father as "Abba, Father". Now *Abba* is Aramaic for father. So it is almost like saying, "Father, Father", although it is a term of endearment. Some versions translate "Abba, Father" as "Dear Father", the way some of us like to start our public prayers, and private too--"Dear Father". You remember Paul in Romans and Galatians invites us to do precisely that. He says that when the Spirit of truth dwells within us, we will address the Father as "Dear Father..." (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)

But, of course, most important, what would we talk about? Could you on such a precious occasion say, "Thank you, God, for today's groceries and here is my list for tomorrow. Amen", and then go on about your business? Or more seriously, right there with the Father, might you say, "Bless the missionaries as they carry the truth to the far flung corners of the earth. Remember the colporteurs as they take our truth-filled literature from door to door." The Lord might say, "How sweet! How is it that you only think of these things when you are at the time of prayer?" Of course, if you are the wife of a colporteur, the mother of a missionary, how appropriate for you to talk to God about your loved ones. Colporteurs and missionaries, above all people, deserve and need our prayers. But if we are not thinking about them the rest of the time, is it that when we talk to God, we feel that we should only mention the most lofty themes and not the things we have been really thinking about all day?

You see, for some of us, those well-worn phrases about the missionaries and the colporteurs, the sort of thing we understand we ought to mention when we pray, might seem rather empty when we are talking face-to-face with God as with a friend. Or, if we should leave the meeting and walk through a garden in the community, wouldn't it be natural, walking with God, to comment with admiration on the beauty and fragrance of a rose, and the beautiful sounds of the mockingbirds? (Aren't they magnificent right now?) And then that lovely sound of the mourning dove. Why couldn't we tell Him how beautiful it was to create things that way? Or walking through the garden, would we simply say, "We thank thee, Lord, for the beauties of nature that surround us", and move on to some other topic? We do have well-worn phrases to cover these things!

It seems to me that if God really were our Friend, we would take time to talk about these things and to be more specific about them, as we would with other members of the family. We might even venture to ask Him about the thorns on the rose. "Did you put them there? If so, why?"

Or is it all right to ask questions of our God? Job did, and he honored God with his confidence. You remember how boldly, but reverently, Job agonized with God--to the

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consternation of his friends. They worried that God would surely smite Job for daring to talk to the Father like this. The whole book is on this subject. I have picked just one place. Look at Job 29:2-4 (GNB) and Job 30:20 (GNB). Job cries to God, "If only my life could once again be as it was when God watched over me. God was always with me then...and the friendship of God protected my home...I call to you, O God, but you never answer, and when I pray, you pay no attention."

How that worried Job's friends, but was God offended? No, look at our next verse, Job 42:7 (GNB). God said to the three friends, who were so worried, "You did not speak the truth about me the way my servant Job did." You see, Job knew God, and He honored God with those cries. God was not talking to him just then, and Job was deeply upset because their friendship seemed to be at an end. What had upset the friends, complemented God, and spoke well of their relationship.

Now surely there are serious questions we too could ask in these modern times about our God. You think of the accidents that happen. Sometimes to the best people among us. Could you name a few? Is it that the guardian angels are beginning to relax their protection? (see Rev. 7:1-3) Serious questions about God often arise in a great medical center like this. Why is it that God sometimes does not heal His trusting friends, even though we ask Him to? I believe that God, as we know Him, might well say to us, "Trust Me. I can't explain it to you just now. I hope you trust Me enough to be willing to wait for the day when I can make it plain to you. I hope you have found enough evidence and enough reason for trusting Me that much. Besides, you know I would never allow you to be tried and tested more than you are able to bear." You remember later, Paul gave that explanation. Look at 1 Corinthians 10:13 (Goodspeed). "God can be depended on not to let you be tried beyond your strength." Then, God might go on to say, "You also know, that in all things, I work for your good among those of you who love Me and let Me do it." So Paul said in Romans 8:28 (GNB), "We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him." That is the correct way to translate that verse. It is not--"Don't worry, everything is going to be all right". The word God should be earlier in the verse. "We know that in all things *God* works for good"--It isn't just good luck.

But then, if we trusted God enough, even respected and revered Him enough to take the time to listen, we might hear God provoke the questions Himself. You think about how God stirred His friend Abraham as He was on His way down to Sodom and Gomorrah to consume those cities. He said, "I wouldn't do this without first telling my friend, Abraham."

Then, you remember Abraham's reply and how he dared to reason with his God. Look at Genesis 18:23,25 (RSV). This is just a part of the whole conversation. "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? ...Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'" Have you ever dared say that to God? Was God offended? No, look at James 2:23 (GNB). "Abraham was called God's friend." That is just one of the places in the Bible where he is so spoken of.

Then you remember how God spoke to Moses, His friend. He said, "I am sick and tired of these people. Step aside and let me destroy them." But look at the words in Numbers 14:11-13, 16 (RSV). "And the Lord said to Moses, ...'I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.' But Moses said to the Lord, 'Then the Egyptians will hear of it...Then the nations who have heard thy fame will say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to give to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.'" Moses showed his jealousy for God's reputation. Was God offended by this? No, look at Exodus 33:11 (GNB). "The Lord would speak

with Moses face-to-face, just as a man speaks with a friend."

Now one would need to know God very well to talk to Him like this. Surely Moses and Abraham knew God well. You recall how even Peter once dared to say "No" to God. He did it three times. Look at Acts 10:13,14 (RSV). You remember the story of the sheet that came down three times with all the forbidden things inside. "There came a voice to him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'No, Lord.'" "No Lord", the second time. I venture there was quite a quiver in his voice when for the third time, he said, "No, Lord. I can't do it." Did God rebuke Peter for doing that?

This is the kind of relationship that God desires to have with us, His children. When we have such a relationship, prayer simply cannot be a trite formality, but honest conversation about things that matter the most to us. Above all, the conversation must be honest, or it isn't real friendship after all. That would mean that if there is a Brother Jones working near you who is irritating you to death, and that night you kneel and say, "Or Lord, do bless Brother Jones. Thou knowest how I love him." Then listen closely and you might hear God say, "That is very sweet. But, why don't you tell Me the truth. You hate the ground he walks on. And if you would only just admit it, maybe I could begin to help you. But so long as you pretend, there is not much I can do."

When David was depressed, he said so. Look for example in Psalm 77:7-10 (RSV). I could have chosen many other passages, as you know. "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? ...And I say, 'It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.'" He said that to God in prayer. Of course, that is only the first half of the psalm. You know you must read on and read it all. You will find in the end of the 77th Psalm how David resolved his depression.

But now if David wanted vengeance, he wouldn't say, "Lord, thou knowest how I love Brother Isaac and I hope his crops will flourish this year," when really David wished that the blood of Brother Isaac would water the furrows of his field and the locusts would consume his crops. David would kneel and say, "Lord, thou knowest my thoughts anyway, so why should I pretend." Look at Psalm 139:19, 21-24 (RSV). "O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God, ...Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. (But without pausing, he goes right on.) Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Parentheses supplied)

You see, he invited healing and he knew he needed a new heart and a right spirit--truth in the inner man. So he first would present himself honestly to God. He said, "You know all my thoughts anyway. So, why should I hide. You know how I feel. So search me and may my thoughts and the meditations and the words of my mouth be acceptable to you."

If you should watch a loved one die, and you should cry, "Why God? Why?" Would God be offended? Would the God you know reach down and put an arm around your shoulder and say, "I understand how you feel. You wouldn't be human if you didn't feel that way. Someday I will make it plain to you. I wish I could right now. But, please trust Me enough to be willing to wait."

But, you see, we have to know God well before those emergencies arise. So that we can trust Him and pray to Him like this. That is why Paul said we need the Holy Spirit of truth to be

able to trust and pray like this. In Romans 8:26 (RSV), we read that familiar verse, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought." And so the Holy Spirit brings the truth to us--the truth about God. The Holy Spirit helps us to see that truth and to be convinced about it--and the truth about ourselves and learn how to tell the truth to our gracious Heavenly Father. And then God can do good things for us.

Paul even said we should pray without ceasing. Note the verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (Norlie). "Never stop praying." Or as Goodspeed translates it, "Never give up praying." But if we should spend all our time on our knees, we would never get anything else done. How can one pray without ceasing and still be effective in this life? *Prayer, you see, in its very essence is thinking toward God.* It means that God is at the very center of our thoughts. Eventually it becomes a habit that God should be at the very center of all our plans always.

When we see Him face-to-face, as we know we shall, will that be the end of prayer? Does that mean that prayer is yet another of the emergency measures God has used to keep open the channels of communication between Himself and His children until the time comes when there will be no need to talk together anymore? What do we mean when we sing, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer"? "Farewell, farewell, I will never talk to you God again." No, if prayer is conversation with a Friend, when we meet God, the hour of prayer will have barely just begun.

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Conversations About God - Tape 15B

Venden: A friend over here raised the question on our topic of this evening. And as we try to do, we'd like to stay with the topic until we make sure that we've covered those questions; and then we can move on to other topics as well. But she said a man came to her--now you correct me if I don't get this just right--a man came to her and said, "The reason you don't get answers to prayer, is because you don't pray right. You aren't going about it the right way. And one of the important ways or ingredients in prayer, is groaning." The Bible says something about groans. And that's the *New International Version* about what the Spirit is doing. And so he said, "Now, I'll pray." And he prayed; and in the middle of his prayer, was this great "sound"; he let out a groan, or he prayed groaningly. And what I think our sister is wondering is, How would you respond to that? Is that maybe an important ingredient?

Maxwell: Oh, that's an interesting thought. I suppose that reflects the verse in Romans 8, that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, and so on. I don't think it's the sounds we make anyway. The Lord knows our thoughts. You remember in the Psalm, it says, "You know my thoughts altogether; even before I express them You know them." So He knows whether it's sincere or not. I think the hazard would be, that if one thought groaning would help, one might just groan, you know, to be a little more influential with the Lord. It had better come spontaneously. Look, if you are really suffering, you don't have to say, "Let me see, am I expressing my suffering enough to get enough sympathy from my family? I think I'll groan a little louder." You're not going to tell yourself to groan. If you really are suffering, the groans may come through. You might even be trying to hold them back. And I think it might be more that way with the Lord, you know. The more you might be holding it back, but He knows what's in there. And if it comes out as it did with the Lord, you know, He didn't say, "I think I'll now perspire with blood in My perspiration," you remember. No. It came. So I'm afraid of anything that's suggested as something else you ought to do, in order for God to answer prayer.

No, in all honesty, present yourself to God, and the thing that's on your mind. And don't worry about the form, or whether or not you groan, and things like that. I think that would be hazardous. I don't know what thought went into the advice this individual gave, that we should also groan.

It's like the verse, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness." And I heard someone preach years ago that that's why he preached in such a pugilistic manner. He says, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. But if we have controversy, it will be less mysterious." You can use the Bible that way. I wish I'd collected--oh, it would have been worthless anyway--all the illustrations like this I have heard of the misuse of the Bible.

No, when Jesus was in the garden and He fell dying to the ground, He wasn't saying, "If I do that, maybe My Father will remove this cup from Me." He was overwhelmed with it. He didn't have to think whether He was groaning or not.

So the main thing is to be absolutely sincere. And don't worry about the groans. It seems to me. That would be a very strong conviction on my part. How do you feel, Pastor, about that?

Venden: Well, I had another question I was going to bring into that. And that had to do with the time in prayer. I'm wondering if this brother was perhaps wanting to get at the idea of being very serious about-- Well, you talk about Jesus, think about Jesus praying all night long. And

sometimes we have trouble praying a couple of minutes. What's the difference there?

Maxwell: I remember in England there were many places - England being a little older - they would show where there were depressions in the wooden floors. And they'd say, "This is where so-and-so knelt to pray." And I'd look at that. Here's an oak floor. And I'd think, How long he must have spent there! And what condition were his knees in? Because as a boy, it didn't take me that long to pray. "Bless Mommy, bless Daddy, and my brothers and sisters; and the missionaries, and the colporteurs," and a few other things. And I was nearly through. And don't you love it how children will get into bed, and then hop out and say, "Oh, and bless Uncle Bill" and then back into bed? I think the Lord just loves that sort of thing with children.

When I was at PUC-- you know, the hill; and my little sister, now all grown up, she lived in Mountain View. And she would kneel and pray that I would not fall off the hill. She had the picture. I think the Lord just loves that sort of thing. You know. But I have as I've grown up now, spent many nights reading. And having the experience I mentioned in the other room, of reacting to what I'm reading, and having a wonderful time. I'll never forget the night I really satisfied myself as to why Jesus had to die. And another night I satisfied myself - it was back in the forties - as to what Jesus is doing now in the heavenly Sanctuary that makes a difference but doesn't put God in a bad light as if He has to be pled with. And I remember realizing I had been all by myself, in a very lonely spot, a little place up at PUC behind Graf Hall nobody ever knew about. Seven years I studied there. And I was pounding the desk, saying "That is simply tremendous! Who am I talking to?" You know, I was saying to the Lord, "This is magnificent! Just magnificent!" And it was a reaction to reading. When I look up it was about three in the morning.

So then I could realize that back in England there have been people who have communed with God at great length and been quite unaware of the time. "Now let's see, I've only done one hour. I've got five to go." Or in my study I keep looking at the floor and saying, "Who's going to come and visit my study? Because there isn't even a dent in the carpet!" You know, you don't do that, like that groaning thing. No. I mean, you don't worry about that; you just do it.

Haven't you had the experience? Or have you ever been really worried about something enough that you thought about it all night long? Now, if you're thinking toward God, He's the center of your thoughts, then you're praying the whole time long. And you're not saying, "Bless this person, and bless that one," for the one hundred and seventy-fifth time. No, you're reasoning with God; thinking with God; remembering the things He said. And happy the person who has read enough to be able to remember what God has said. And you have this conversation with God. I'm sure many of you have had that experience. So now as I'm older, I understand how that could be done.

Venden: Marv had a question here.

Comment: What situation then is being described when Christ and the three came back down, and the other disciples were trying to cast out a demon and it wouldn't go. And He said, "This is going to take prayer and fasting." What situation might have been, in the great controversy model, going on there?

Maxwell: Well, I think the prayer and fasting implies a certain attitude toward the situation and toward God. And the disciples were not in that state of mind. They were trying to do it in some other way. This is one thing that worried Jesus about His own performance of miracles; that they

would come to rely on this free food and free medicine, and so on; and follow Him for the wrong reason. And the disciples had watched Jesus do it, and they were trying it themselves. And they didn't realize what really is involved in that. And He called it prayer and fasting.

By the way, many times where you read "prayer and fasting" in the King James, the early manuscripts say only "prayer." There are even some places in the Bible that speak of fasting, and prayer isn't mentioned, as in the book of Esther. You remember, they fasted. It doesn't mention prayer. But in the experience of fasting, if it's genuine, of course you're praying. And in genuine praying, if it was a matter of great concern, it was quite customary to fast. Which doesn't mean going entirely without food. It means that you're disciplining yourself. You're very concerned to think very clearly; to allow nothing to come between you and God and a solution to the problem.

So apparently they were not doing it as seriously as they should, recognizing how God is involved. Their attitude. He didn't analyze it in great detail. But they obviously were doing it wrong. But prayer and fasting simply suggests the sincerity and the humility and the recognition that only God can do it. It's not a matter of magic, either. So I think that's involved. I'd want to compare many other places with it, as always; not just take the one.

Venden: All right. Right here.

Comment: Well, I just had a thought about the fasting thing. That might not necess...I mean, of course, it's because you're earnest. But it's also because you're so involved that you don't want to get up and take time to go eat, too.

Maxwell: It could be that. Sometimes it's that you don't eat any fancy food; you eat very plain food. Yes.

Comment: Right, right. But what I saying is, food isn't the most important thing when you're in this deep conversation. And you might eat some for strength. But that isn't the big issue at all.

Maxwell: Well, now, some of you who are about to take some very serious exams in the near future; some are already doing it; some are taking "mock boards" already, and they're not that "mock" are they, really? That's not an adequate word to describe them. There's certainly nothing funny about that. Do you eat a very large, fancy meal before going to the exams? And then get a little sleepy in the middle of them. You say, "Well, that doesn't make any sense." Well, it also makes no sense to eat an enormous meal and come to church, and sit there nodding.

Ellen White's so eloquent on this. I love the way she puts things. She says that in a service the most precious words may be spoken but are not appreciated, because members in the audience are so sleepy. And then she would say, "But of course, if you were on duty all night as a nurse, as a physician, the Lord would understand. He might say, perhaps, 'Don't nod here; nod somewhere else,' perhaps." But the Lord is very understanding of these matters.

But if from church service to church service I always sleep through most of it because I haven't prepared myself, God isn't angry with me. I just lose. And so if I'm about to enter into an experience where I need real clarity of mind, I'll be careful about what I eat. I mean, I'd be very candid to say; Before coming to these Friday Evening meetings, I eat a very light meal. If I ate a large one, I wouldn't remember things. I don't remember things as well as I want to anyway. So I don't want food to stand in my way. And I don't feel I'm under restrictions here. The Lord says, "Thou shalt not eat a good supper before going to Conversations About God." And I say, "God, if You say it, I believe it. That's all there is to it." You don't do that. I say, "Lord, that makes sense.

I'm hoping I can think clearly all evening long." So I of my own free will, choose to do that. Don't you all do that kind of thing? So we all understand: again what God asks us to do makes such good sense, we shouldn't even need to be told. It certainly isn't restrictive.

Venden: This gentleman here has a question.

Comment: Professor Maxwell, speaking of eating, what about saying the blessings over food? Quote, you know, "God, bless this fried chicken, or vege-chicken," or whatever you want to say. You know, and the little kids say that, you know. "Oh God, bless this food for my body." What does that mean? What am I saying?

Maxwell: Oh, I think that's so interesting. Because that's probably the most frequent prayer we offer, isn't it? Hopefully we still do it. I think that's one of the nicest things we do. Don't you?

As I think I mentioned last week, I had my three daughters home, and all my grandchildren this week. And it was just lovely. And one grandson, just a little boy--and I love to hear him say the blessing and lead us all in doing it. He says it so very carefully. Sometimes we sing it, because my father used to sing it. So the whole group of us around the table, we all sing it together. I won't try it right here; but why not sing the blessing?

But there's a very famous illustration or two. You might have heard about the preacher who - he preached on Sunday. And he sat down to Sunday dinner, and it was pork. And so he is reported to have said, "Lord, if Thou canst under the New Dispensation bless that which Thou didst curse under the Old Dispensation, bless this food."

You have heard that one, haven't you? You know. But then I remember a blessing my father told me about. He attended Stanborough Park College before it became Newbold later on, and you know where it is now. He says that in those really poverty-stricken days, when he was in the dormitory, he was asked to offer the blessing. And it was a very, almost transparent, watery bean soup. And he said that he located one bean floating in the soup. And he was asked to offer the blessing. Some of you knew my father. Um hum! And so he was asked to offer the blessing.

And he arose and said, "Lord, if Thou canst - and with Thee all things are possible - strengthen us with this bean soup." I recall he got into some difficulty with the preceptress at the time for having done this.

But you know, we do interesting things at mealtime. We sometimes call the blessing "grace"; we "offer grace." And then we define grace as "unmerited favor," quite consistently. And that means you bow your head and say, "Lord, You don't deserve this; but thank You for this food." And that reminds us of the real meaning of grace. Grace is gracefulness to begin with. "They marveled at the words of grace that came out of His mouth." That is, the gracious words that came out of His mouth.

There is no such thing as grace without a person being gracious. And at an appropriate time, it does mean gratitude; it does mean thanks. In Romans 7, where Paul says, "All the good [sic] that I don't want to do, is what I do. The good that I want to do, I don't do. Who will deliver me from this doomed body? Thanks be to God." You know what that is? "Grace." That's right, you know that. You see, you say, "You don't deserve this God, but thank You for delivering me." It wouldn't make sense. So when we offer grace, we're saying "Thanks."

But now, God has met for lunch with Abraham and Sarah. And remember, of course, what Sarah fixed for lunch that day. And can you imagine them seated there; and here's the Lord, and

Abraham and Sarah. And Abraham says, "Well, normally before we eat, we offer grace. I'm not quite sure how we ought to do this with You here, Lord." And I can imagine the Lord saying, "Well, let Me do it." And He'd bow His head and say, "Thank you, Sarah. Lovely dinner. Never had a nicer dinner. You really fixed this beautifully."

It would be a very heartwarming moment, wouldn't it? You know. Because He's the One who created everything on that occasion. That's why I really feel at such times, they can be very pleasant; they are an acknowledgement that but for God, what good thing would we have? Even the ability to chew it and digest it and so on. And then the pleasant fellowship around the table.

I sometimes think though, that on that occasion we often forget about the food and pray for everything else in the universe while the dinner gets cold. I mean, I hope I'm not saying something that you would take personally here. But it's a very wonderful thing to meet and eat: The first thing we do in the Kingdom, don't we understand? I mean, it's a time to think of the food and the one who prepared it; the One who created it, and one who prepared it, and then get on with the food? A pleasant time.

So when we were children, my father started a blessing, a grace, among us, that is of the very essence: "Thank God for this good food. Amen." Now, as little children we said it. Then as my children came along, we said it with them. It was easy for them to learn. And now the grandchildren are saying it. And so we're all around the table. And guess what, we all say it together. "Thank God for this good food. Amen."

But little Robbie, who lives back in Virginia and was with us this morning, said, "Grandpa, that's not quite right. You should say, `Thank You, God for this good food. Amen.'" That's the way we did it this morning, and it was lovely. Now, that's the very essence, isn't it? You know. Oh, any variation will do, but it must be an expression of gratitude. That's the blessing. It isn't rather that, "This food is so poorly prepared, Lord, bless it, if Thou canst." Or some roast of mysterious concoction: you say, "Lord, I think I need double blessing before I venture into this roast."

It's like the loaf that the matron at PUC--do you remember Miss Spear at PUC? Well, we could tell the day in the week by the main entree. When we came to Friday, we had what was known as "Miss Spear's Enthusiastic Loaf." It was called her "Enthusiastic Loaf", because she put everything she had, into it.

And so all through the years I've thought of what the meaning is when we offer the blessing, you know. When you look at food your wife prepares tomorrow, and you wonder what it is; but you want to be polite, and you say, "Wife, this is really manna." Remember what the Hebrew means: "What is it? What is it?"

So meal is a time that provokes to mind to lots of thought. Eating is supposed to be a highly social occasion. The Lord made it so, didn't He? He very frequently ate with people as He talked about things. And He would accept invitations to eat with the offscouring of the earth, you remember: tax collectors, prostitutes, winebibbers - they thought He was one, too. And I love Ellen White's comment that at those meals, He would skillfully turn the conversation in a worthwhile direction. But not with a heavy hand. So you know, if it gets heavy at meal, you don't digest the food. So it should be a pleasant time.

Well, the blessing brings many nice things to mind. I think the blessing should.

Venden: We have a question back here.

Comment: I was wondering how come, when the Bible talks so much about how we should pray with thanksgiving, and so on and so forth, why so many of us, even in public prayer church or wherever, never tell God Thank You before we say Amen. Why don't we tell Him Thank You for what we ask for?

Maxwell: Well, I rather like that, because we tend so often to lodge our requests - most of the time. Whereas actually you could thank Him the whole time and say, "Oh, I forgot to ask Him for anything." That would be all right. Yes. Oh, I think one should do it.

Comment: Why don't we? We say, "Lord, we want this, this, this, this and this." And then, "Amen."

Maxwell: Fortunately, I can think of some exceptions from time to time. And I very much enjoy the prayers where we are talking about how beautifully God has done something, and how much we appreciate it. I think God loves to hear that kind of thing. We do from each other. No, I think that makes a very beautiful prayer, and we should do it, by all means.

Of course, that's the word-- the idea of praise in there. Unfortunately, to praise God, has sometimes deteriorated into a sort of endless repetition of, "Praise God, Praise God, Hallelujah, Hallelujah." I think the Lord becomes a little weary of that after awhile. If I had done something worthwhile and afterwards everyone gathered around and said, "Praise you, Hallelujah," for forty-five minutes; I think I'd want to leave a little earlier.

If someone came and said, "I think I got the point tonight; I think I got it," or maybe say nothing; but the next day I hear that person weaving it in; that's praise of the best kind.

So I think that we ought to be more specific with God. I mentioned the garden just very briefly. I think to walk through a garden and say, "We thank Thee for all the beauties of nature around us"; we could be more specific.

I think you pick a Mr. Lincoln, that big red rose. And the fragrance of that rose is absolutely magnificent! And you just caught your finger on the thorn. So you bleed as you smell that marvelous smell. That raises some interesting conversation.

Or, some linnets just built a nest in a pine tree by our front door. And it's absolutely beautiful in symmetry, and four little blue eggs. And I just love to watch that. I've always been interested in what birds do. And a scrub jay came and took all four of the eggs. You know, it really stirs you at the moment. You wonder what you could do. And I think I spotted him over on the fence right afterwards. And I wished I could dispose of him. Of course, he was doing what scrub jays do. But it raises questions: Will they do this in the hereafter?

So, but I thank the Lord for the hummingbirds that come around. Isn't it magnificent? We have two owls around our place. All the time. And the hoot to each other. And sometimes they both come on our antenna. And they bill and coo up there. And you can hear them in the house; it comes down the chimney. That's gorgeous to watch. God designed it that way.

No, I think to remember these things and to refer to them, does us a lot of good too. We realize the world isn't all bad, too. It's rather encouraging.

Do you remember in Romans, when God said to Abraham, "You'll have a son," he said, "I don't see how," and he laughed. You know, it wasn't just Sarah laughed; they both laughed. Well, it was rather funny, when you stop to think of it. The age they were. And God didn't hold it against

them that they laughed. He put them both in the Hebrews 11 chapter as having lots of faith; even though they laughed. But do you remember how Paul says Abraham resolved the question? He said, "He gave glory to God, and praised God; and as he thought about the fact that God was the Creator, he said, 'It would be nothing for Him to miraculously give me a son.'"

So if prayer is again thinking about God in these things, it has a great benefit on us. So the praise and the thanksgiving is a very appropriate part, and we're benefitted by it I believe.

Venden: All right, right over here.

Comment: How do you respond to people who say, "Well, the reason you don't get the answer to your prayer, is because you're not doing it right. You need to claim the promise— open your Bibles to a certain verse, claim the promise, and then thank God that you have it. And you will have it. And if you don't get it, that's because you didn't have enough faith, or you didn't use the formula right, or-- you know."

Maxwell: There are a number of aspects to that. 1) Letting the Bible open and pointing to a passage. They don't report on the times the finger landed on the wrong passage. You know, that can happen. There's nothing good luck about the Bible. It suggests God runs His universe that way. Then God is capricious, not trustworthy. He doesn't do things that way.

Now, if I believe that that's the right way; like casting lots, which is not the best way— God stooped and blessed them in casting lots. You remember how they picked the tribe of Levi? It's not the best way, but God blessed them in doing it. You remember when they chose someone to take Judas's place, they cast lots. Oh, I think God always meets us where we are and blesses us.

So I'm not going to say it has not happened, that a trusting person said, "Lord, guide me," and opened the Bible and points to the place. But you know, how could you be sure? You've still got to check it out, very carefully. Because at the other end is this: There are those who say, "If you do it right, and if you have enough faith, God is bound to fulfil His promise. He will heal you. And so let us pray that He heal you. Put your hand on your television, and I will pray, God,"— and I can't imitate it. I feel irreverent when I do it. And they shout to God, "HEAL this person," as if God has to do it.

And then you write in, "I wasn't healed." They say, "Well, you didn't do it in the right way. You put the wrong hand on the TV, or you don't have enough faith, or you didn't send in your fifty dollars," or what have you. You see, that is a way of making this foolproof. You see, there's something wrong with what you did. But God is bound to do this thing.

Well then, they don't know what to do with Job. God says, "There's a perfect man." And he trusted God so much, God said to the devil, "You can do anything you like to this man, short of taking his life." So Job prayed for his family and lost them. He prayed for his estate and lost it all. He prayed for his health and he lost it. And the legalistic theologians who take the point you've just mentioned said, "We know you must have sinned terribly. Because God, if you're good, is bound to keep His promise; and you will be blessed and you will be prospered."

And God says, "The man has not sinned." The theologians say, "Yes he has." They were wrong. Job was right. Job trusted God enough, to trust Him even though He allowed Satan to do those things. He was not tested more than he was able to bear. And when it was all over, God turned to the universe and said, "I told you that man wouldn't let Me down."

So there are many large sections in the Bible that folk who take that view cannot read. They don't know what to do with them. Job is not used very much.

Now, turning it around, though: If I have the faith of a little child, and I ask for help; God is so eager to help the faith of a little child. And that's where Bedtime Stories came from, you know; all forty-six volumes. And I watched them all through the years as Dad wrote them.

And the family runs out of food; and in simple faith they pray. They've hardly said "Amen," and someone knocks on the door with a food basket. You remember all those stories? You remember the car, and the had a flat tire? And it eventually had four flats. And those tires came! Dad checked out all those stories very, very carefully. There's truth behind every one of those stories.

But what if you run out of food? And you pray in faith, and nobody knocks on your door. And you still trust God. That doesn't qualify as a Bedtime Story. That's the book of Job. That's for adults. That's for grownups. And as adults we need to read those, too. The Bible has all kinds. Say more, though.

Comment: On the Bedtime Stories--my kids love them--but when they don't get what they're looking for-- for instance, just the other day my daughter misplaced something. And, "Oh, let's pray and ask Jesus to help us find it." Well, He didn't help her find it right away. And, you know, "But Mommy, that's what happened in the Bedtime Stories."

Maxwell: Sometimes they looked a little longer. And sometimes they didn't find it, because I remember. I remember some of the boat stories and other things. And God didn't keep little Robert from getting a tummy ache, you remember, after eating the hollow pie, and all those other things. One needs to read them all. And that's why Dad finished with Bible stories, in most of the volumes— some Bible stories to balance that. And then came along with Children's Hour, which is a little older. And then the Bible story [books] to cover the Sixty-six. He was trying to. . . And then he wrote many more adult books than people know, in the 113 or so books that he wrote. There were many of those, like Your Bible and You, in which he tried to speak to adults. He was trying to cover all the way across.

I have to tell you, that when he was dying--it was only five days between when he found he had leukemia, the acute kind when you hemorrhage so traumatically, and he died. He learned on Sunday, and he died just as the sun went down Friday evening. And we all were there. And we took turns sitting with him. And he didn't open his eyes very often, but he talked. And I remember saying to Dad, that I thought maybe one of the greatest things he had ever done, was to write the children's stories. Because that's when we're most influenced. And the goal of Bedtime Stories was to lead people not just to say, "I love the Lord," but to like Him. You know, to really trust Him. And that may stay with you all the rest of your life. And some have suggested that the stories, you know, are not quotes, "truth-filled literature." You know. Not full message book. All depends what you think the Good News is. And I said to my father, "To me, the essence of the Good News is the truth about God. And you have presented Him as a lovable, likable, trustable God. That's the big thing. And that comes through in all those stories.

So I think in those books, he may have made his major contribution, in helping lots of children like and trust God. So to me, that's real theology. That's the essence of the message. I don't know if he'll remember that. I don't know how much memory he can have of that week. But if not, I'll tell him again-- later on.

Do you feel that way about the stories? I grew up on them. Except we were involved in so many

of them in the beginning. You know. We have a pact between us; we do not tell who did what. Though my oldest grandson came up to me not too long ago and said, "Grandpa, is it true you ate the gooseberries?" Somebody let me down. [Laughter] Someday I'll give you all the details on the rest of that story.

Venden: Graham, it almost seems appropriate. The sermon title for tomorrow comes here from Bedtime Stories: "Cupboard Love."

Maxwell: That's right.

Venden: And Dr. Maxwell helped me track down the story that I remembered from many years ago, from which that title comes. So be here tomorrow, and you'll hear a Bedtime Story:

Maxwell: "Cupboard Love," that's right.

Venden: All right, Eldridge has been waiting patiently here.

Comment: When you say a prayer at nighttime, and you say "Amen"; you do it in real fine environment, you go to sleep and figure your prayer is going to last all night. But when you have your devotions in the morning and say "Amen," you go out into the real world. How long is that "Amen" supposed to last?

Maxwell: Well, of course you know the meaning of the word Amen. Amen really simply means, "I mean it." The Greek is "Amen" [ah-mayn] and the Hebrew is very much like it. In fact, there's a verse in the Hebrew that says, "If you won't Amen me, then neither will I Amen you." You see.

So it's translated in the King James, "verily." When it's at the beginning of a statement, it's, "Verily, verily I say unto you." "Amen, Amen, lego humin..." When it comes on the end, you don't say, "For we ask this in Jesus' name. Verily." It doesn't sound right; so then we go into the Greek, and we say, "Amen."

And unfortunately, that's become not much more than a punctuation mark. And it's the final indication to the choir to be ready. Whereas—I've mentioned this before—unfortunately, when we come to, "For we ask this in Jesus' name," that alerts the choir. "Amen" says, "respond," you know. These are weighted words. And I forget whether I've mentioned this before. But "Amen" never meant more to me, than that service when we dedicated the organ here. And do you remember Elder Frank Moran, who was dying up in the hospital. Lung cancer. A saint like that. Just shows us that it's a dangerous place to live, even if you lead a very, very careful life. Think how he did.

Well, it was suggested I might have an opportunity in church to pay a brief tribute to Elder Moran, who would be up in the hospital and would be listening on the radio. And he only lived about a week after this. And we had the choir, and the orchestra, and the ensembles. We had everything. Do you remember that Sabbath? That was the greatest musical day I've ever heard. It was tremendous.

So when I got up, I spoke a few words about Elder Moran, and said, "I wish we could send some message up to him in bed." And, do you remember how at the end of his prayers he would say, "Amen"? Do you remember, he never said, "For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen." He would say, "We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN!" Do you remember? Elder Frank Moran would always do that.

So, I said, "In the Bible, at the end of one of the passages in the Psalms, it says, 'And let all the people say Amen.' So why don't we do that? If I repeat those words, 'Let all the people say, Amen,' would you all—" and there were two thousand, six hundred people jammed in that day—"would you join me in saying, Amen? And Elder Moran will hear it." And so I said, "Let all the people say . . ." Do you remember? Oh, the resonance in that church! "AMEN!" It was just terrific.

Later on I heard that a Jewish gentleman in the audience - not an Adventist - had heard me explain what Amen means. It means, "I endorse you! I support you! I mean it!" Wouldn't that therefore be a good message to send up to Elder Moran? "We support you, as you support God." And so on.

Well, then I went up to hear if he'd heard. Well, it had fortunately been recorded on cassette. And more than once he said, "Play that to me again." You know, all his friends down here saying that word that meant so much to him. And it wasn't the end of a prayer to him. It expressed his confidence, his support, his loyalty. "I mean it. Amen."

So I can't say Amen at the end and it not have some meaning. His life and experience adds a lot to Amen. Can you think of some others, too, in life? The older we get, the more these symbols accumulate meaning, don't they? That's the way it is with words. They're just symbols of meaning. And our experience has a lot to do with it.

So Amen; how long does it last?

Comment: The prayer for the day.

Maxwell: The prayer for the day? Well, hopefully one thing toward God. Now you would, if you went to a committee and planned; you'd think about Him.

Comment: [Your having to deal with] the real world; I mean, you're not in a committee. You're out driving cars with crazy traffic; or...

Maxwell: In that case, you'd think about Him maybe more frequently. You know, it would pay to do so; yes. No, I don't think there's anything terminal about Amen. That's why it might be good to say Amen in the middle, and to say Amen at the beginning. It is not indicated in scripture that that's a word to end things with, any more than "In Jesus' name" is supposed to come at the end. It would be better—it would fit what you said—to start the prayer with "In Jesus' name we come." I mean, we wouldn't be here; we wouldn't know how to approach God, if He had not come.

So "In Jesus' name," shouldn't be left at the end. Then we get into a bad habit of just saying it as a formula. So I would say a prayer without ceasing—never stop praying—suggests that Amen is never terminal.

What do you think. I know in experience you do that.

Comment: Well, it's just that in the kind of work that you do, you would have this thought all day long. But the kind of work that people do out in the real world. . . [Laughter]

Maxwell: I like that. I like that. Although that does remind me. One time a General Conference office came to Loma Linda. And he hadn't been previously instructed on the nature of the audience - medical, dental and other students. And so he was thinking that it was a college

audience, pre-professional. He said, "Now, when you really get out into the world and face life, and you really face life and death matters. . ." And here are students in the audience who have just come from seeing patients die. And they talked about it afterwards, you know. "How could he say that to us? We've probably seen more people die than he has." He says, "When you get out there, face life." So you were teasing there. [Laughter] That would be very real.

Venden: You have a question here. And then one back over by the wall (we'd we better move along).

Comment: Doesn't the Holy Spirit intercede for our prayers? I'm not saying that we can just pray any way we want to, and the Holy Spirit is going to correct it, or put it in the words that are— or present it to God in a more spiritual way. But what truth is there in that?

Maxwell: Well, I think He works through us though, you see. He's the One who inspired some of our fellow believers to bring the Biblical record, without which we wouldn't know God. He's the One who still works to convince us, but not against our will. You see. He helps us to see this. That's why we could say, "I believe in impressions, but I have to test every one of them." It might be a bad influence, but I would welcome the influence of the Holy Spirit.

And sometimes when the evidence adds up, and you feel very greatly convinced, I don't stop to say, "Am I thinking this through myself, or is it the Spirit?" If He hadn't brought the scriptures, I couldn't do it anyway. So I'm assuming that He's there working with me. And then through this He brings me the picture of God that I like, and helps me like it the more. He helps to bring me the truth about myself, to see myself as I really am. And then I can pray a little more honestly. And in that way, I pray to God in the right way. And I say, "Be merciful to me, a sinner." And not to say, "I thank Thee, Lord, I'm not like these outsiders here; but I'm one of the chosen few." The Spirit did not inspire that man to pray like that. You remember the Pharisee.

But the Spirit helped the publican. He wouldn't even lift his head up, he was so convinced of his need for humility. He said, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Not an eloquent prayer, but a most appropriate one. That would be an inspired, spiritual prayer.

I think the way the Holy Spirit intercedes is not that He goes to the Father and says, "You won't want to see this. This is terrible English. But I'll fix it up for You." We sometimes say that. "The Father is more holy than the other Two. The Father is the only One who will not look upon us, sinners as we are. Only the gracious Son and the gracious Spirit will do so." See what that implies about the Father.

But we do need the help of the Spirit in all those ways that I've mentioned. I think without the Spirit's work, we wouldn't even know God at all. And we wouldn't know the truth about ourselves; we wouldn't know what sin is. And we wouldn't know how to pray for help. We wouldn't know that He wants to help us. So we're very dependent on the Spirit to pray. I think that's how He intercedes for us.

Venden: That ties in with a question that popped into my mind in the presentation in the church here. I have some rather ill-defined ideas having to do with the meaning of incense, and some statements I've heard regarding the righteousness of Christ being represented by the incense, in some way making our prayers acceptable to God. Now, that gets a little bit - makes me a bit uneasy. Would you care to comment on that?"

Maxwell: Yes. Do you remember the evening we talked about God's emergency measures? In order to meet us where we are, and to inspire reverence, He created the whole Old Testament

system there. Now, He says, "In essence, this does reflect the way things are run upstairs; it's true." But the particular form was to meet us in our need.

He didn't say, "Build a cathedral out there in the wilderness." He said, "Build a little tent." That's all. It was very pretty. And they don't have a tent up there that size. A hundred million people watch while the court sits in judgment and the books are open. I mean, "What house would you build for Me?" God says. "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool." What can you build for God?

Again, it's the meaning; and we need to consider the meaning there of all these things. In Heaven we - well, if God is instructing the angels through symbols, yes. And I would grant God, the consummately skillful Teacher, the freedom to use any method, any symbolic representation He wishes in Heaven to the angels as He did to us. But if He's using these symbolic things, like incense rising, then the angels are asking, "Lord, what does the incense mean?"

See, in the end both angels and men, and any who have watched any symbolic representation in Heaven or earth, whatever they are, angels and men alike; we have to ask: "What does this mean?"

And as God looks at the way His Son lived on this earth, it was magnificent; it was beautiful. And one of the most significant things about it, is it said the truth about the Father. And it said the truth about the Holy Spirit. All three Members of the Godhead are just as the Son was. And that is perfectly marvelous. And because They have done it, it makes it possible for us sinners who need so much healing and help, and we're unholy, and we're not safe to have around; if we say, "We love that; help us be like that," God says, "My, the revelation of My Son brought is really working." And even then our most fumbling prayers rise like incense.

Because those prayers say, "We trust this One. We trust Jesus to have said the truth about His Father." The righteousness of Christ has not become some magical thing. It's a historical thing. It's a real thing! The way He lives says the truth about God. And incense to God is when some of us sinners look at it and say, "Oh, that's good. I like that! I'd like to be like that." And we aren't yet. That's what the Lord wants to hear. Now, proof of that? "Abraham trusted God; and God said, 'That's good.'"

Now in the legal model, of course, Abraham believed God, and the cash registers ring, and God says, "I'll credit that to your account." That doesn't make sense. That's still speaking very symbolically in emergency terms. Some versions translate that: "Abraham trusted God, and God recognized that as righteousness." All God asks of us is trust. Because if we trust Him enough to be willing to listen, He can readily heal all the damage done.

Now, we know we're not saints. We're in need of healing. We're His trusting patients, that's what we are; His trusting children. But if we trust Him, we could die tonight, like the thief on the cross. And we'd be perfectly safe to have around in the hereafter; because we'll arise still trusting. That trust is incense to God. He loves that. It brings Him great joy. And there's great joy in Heaven over everyone of us that repents, and is led to trust and faith.

So there's a way in which we can understand this in the real world - as you said, the world of reality - rather than the world of symbols. But thank God for the symbols. If He hadn't given it in those forms to the Israelites, they would not have been inspired to the little reverence they were inspired to. You know, it took she-bears sometimes, earthquakes sometimes, the earth opening up other times. It took priests in flowing vestments and tinkling pomegranates, and all those things; and the death of many animals, much blood flowing; all those things to inspire a little

respect.

But God doesn't run Heaven that way. He runs what's implied by all of that. It is most appropriate to approach God with great reverence and respect. But there is no need to be afraid. And it is true that our sin results in death. But to handle the problems there, Jesus came and died. It's true, death is involved—the shedding of His blood. But I think so many of us, even in the Christian era, are treating the Plan of Salvation as a ceremony. And we settle for very ceremonial descriptions.

You say, "Well, Ellen White did." That's right; it makes her so much like the Bible. When I read her, I feel I'm reading the Scriptures. She uses the same ceremonial language. But there are times when she doesn't. And there are times when the Bible prophets, like Micah - Micah says, "With what shall I come before the Lord? You know, blood of goats, and oil, and all these other things? You know very well what God wants of you; that you will be honest, a man of integrity, and you will walk humbly before your God." And one prophet after another says that.

So then I come to the New Testament. And I come to--Ellen White, by the way, means so much to some of us. And there are those moments when the audience is right, and she can say, "You know, this is really what it means."

And the classic case, since I mentioned this tonight, would be so relevant again. Look at all the pictures of priestly intercession, implying that were Someone not there with the Father saying, "Please, please remember; please forgive," He would not forgive us. And Jesus knew that. He's the One who gave that whole system. They needed it, because they were so scared of God. But when Jesus was about to leave, He said, "I must tell you something plainly about My Father. I don't want you to misunderstand this." You remember the words? "Actually, there is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you." But you say, "Well, I've heard You pleading with the Father." "Yes," He says, "but actually there is no need. He loves you as much as I do."

Why aren't we willing to take that ultimate statement? He says it's plain and clear. It's one of the most magnificent things in the whole Bible. Then you say, "Well why did You give us the whole system?" "Well," He says, "you needed it. I gave it to you, along with she-bears, and thunder and lightning, and the Ten Commandments, and all the ceremonies, and circumcision. All of that was given because you needed it to bring you back to Christ." Isn't that Galatians 3?

So faith does not abolish all those things. Faith says, "God, now I'm beginning to understand. I trust You all the more, because I know that if I need all kinds of emergency measures, You'll give them to me. But forbid that I should misunderstand those measures. They are emergency measures." And someday we'll be up there in mutual love and trust, and He'll never have to command us again to stop killing, and stealing, and being immoral, and so on. For there we'll do what's right because it is right in the highest sense of freedom.

And if you take the Bible as a whole, you have to include those clear places. And this is why we say to Adventists: "Ellen White is suffering right now, because people are picking here a little and there a little." If they take her as a whole, to me, she passes the test. I find her totally Biblical, or I couldn't trust what she says.

You know. So if she speaks for God, as we mentioned in the other room, I've got to test that. Is she in harmony with Scripture? I find her to be in harmony with Scripture. Therefore, I read her with great pleasure and profit as a whole--the whole thing. I have no problem with what she wrote, because I have never had to choose between the Bible and what she wrote. And there has never been any disharmony at all on any point. I would challenge anybody to mention a

point where she's not in harmony with the Scriptures.

And so for me and my house, absolutely. You too are free to be convinced. So the most symbolic language of all, is about the incense rising, and the censor, and the priest. Yes. God gave it to us in our time of need, to inspire reverence and respect. But I must say, "God, tell me; what does all that mean?" And then there come the plain statements. "There's really no need for anybody to plead with Me."

Venden: All right, that brings us to our closing time. So why don't you have a little conversation with our dear Heavenly Father.

Maxwell: Our Loving Father in Heaven, Once again, this time we talk about the invitation to converse with Thee as with a Friend. And we marvel at Thy willingness to do this; when on the one hand we think of who Thou art, and how the mighty angels stand in awe of Thee, and Thy power, and Thy majesty, and Thy glory - even veil their faces. And yet we know that Thou art just as gracious as the Son. How hard it was to convince us of this; God even had to come and live among us in human form.

But then we note from the record, that when Thou didst show Thyself to be so gentle, we tended to be irreverent, and even to despise Thee. Lead us to the place where we'll realize there is no need to be afraid, and yet to be deeply reverent; to recognize who Thou really art.

It makes it all the more wonderful, that Thou art so infinite in power, that Thou art so equally gracious. We have not seen this in anyone else, except in Jesus. But we accept His testimony, that if we have seen Him, we have seen Thee. That if we really knew Him, we would know Thee.

And the Holy Spirit has surely been a gentle Voice. No force. Just the truth, the evidence, spoken in love; and recorded and preserved all through the years in these books we call the Scriptures.

Surely Thou hast left us with no excuse for not knowing Thee. Though even if we're slow, how patient Thou art with us, granting us year after year of time to look again over the evidence and make up our minds about Thee.

We know though, as we look around us in harmony with Scripture, that things do seem to be coming to a moment of crisis and climax. For so many in the world begin to think about religion and think about God, but many gods are being presented; and so many of them do not come close to the picture of Thee. We worry most though, about the ones that are so close; the danger that we might be deceived as the angels were at the hands of one so cunning.

Help us to prepare, that we ourselves may not be dissuaded from the truth during the closing years of earth's history. But that as we survive ourselves, and are not shaken, as Job was not shaken, or Abraham or Moses, we might also rise to the occasion and accept the high privilege of speaking well and true of Thee to our friends.

We thank Thee for the friends who have come these Friday nights; especially for those who do not see things quite the way we Adventists do. Some perhaps have even been turned away, for often we Adventists do not speak well of Thee. But we aspire to speak well of Thee. And so we all defer our opinions and our preachings to the authority of Scripture; the Scripture that is available to Thy children all over this world.

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So we thank Thee for the friends who have come. And we pray they may have heard the truth; and if not, that Thou wilt help them and correct what has been said that is not right.

May we help each other, and so more of us be ready to meet Thee and be unafraid.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOD, #15

A. Graham Maxwell and Louis Venden

"Practical Godliness"

Venden: It seems to me that our topic tonight comes under the heading of what we sometimes speak of as Practical Godliness. Not that there's any impractical godliness, but you have been talking about things that have to do with our daily walk with God and very practical Christianity. And there are a lot of questions. Now our questions that rise with this are not so theoretical or theological in terms of kind of theory, but they really get home to how we go about living our lives. One of the first that comes up when I look at our Bible Reference Sheet here is that here we have what most of us have called the Lord's Prayer, but as you read it, it didn't sound that familiar. Now if we're going to pray the Lord's Prayer, shouldn't we really use the words that Jesus gave us instead of some new translation like this?

AGM: Well, if we were to use the words that Jesus used, we would have to speak in Aramaic.

Venden: He didn't use King James' English.

AGM: That's right. Not even English.

Venden: But, you know, that is so familiar to us, Graham, it's so ingrained within our lives and in the worship of all Christian churches, I wonder.

AGM: Well, I think there's a very important lesson in this. In the Sermon on the Mount, He gave one version recorded in Matthew. The version recorded in Luke which is quite similar but different in interesting ways, is the version He gave to His disciples when they came and said, "Teach us to pray."

Venden: So He gave the same prayer.

AGM: Essentially the same. And that's the point. As the King James' Preface says, "The Kingdom of God is not words and syllables; it's the great ideas." Then you can translate into any language. So it's the meaning of the Lord's Prayer that counts and not the precise words. If we're going to be sticklers about the precise words, we'll have to somehow find the Aramaic that He used, and it isn't even in existence.

Venden: So this isn't a prayer to be repeated then over and over?

AGM: Oh, I think that if we think about it as we do, we can't pray it too often. If it's a meaningful experience. But the danger is, we can start, "Our Father" and come to "Amen" and not even remember what we have said in between because we've done it so often.

Venden: That leads to another question: Why is this called the Lord's Prayer?

AGM: Or the "Pater Noster" in the Latin.

Venden: Yes.

AGM: There's a street in London called Pater Noster Row, and it ends with a corner called Amen Corner. "Pater" means father, and "noster" means ours. Paternoster. Actually, He prayed other prayers that could deserve that title. That magnificent chapter in John, when in the hearing of His disciples, He prayed to the Father. That's the Lord's Prayer. It's just tradition; that's all.

Venden: It might be better to say this is our prayer, the one He gave to us.

AGM: The one He gave to us. Yes.

Venden: That's His prayer.

AGM: Yes. That's right.

Venden: Looking at the way it appears in our Bible Reference Sheet, there is something that seems to be missing here at the end. Those great words, "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory." The Doxology. Isn't that left out?

AGM: It almost seems to end abruptly there.

Venden: Right.

AGM: But in the early manuscripts of Matthew, it's not there. And it isn't in any manuscripts of Luke, you see. So apparently when the Lord gave the Lord's Prayer, so called, it ended with, "Deliver us from the evil of the evil one." But now, should we stop in church repeating the Doxology at the end? There's a Doxology in 1 Chronicles 29 that is four times as great as this one. David prayed it himself. It's simply magnificent. So if one wants to be a purist when doing this, when you come to the Doxology when repeating the Lord's Prayer, save yourself. I'm switching now to 1 Chronicles 29, and it's very Biblical and it's very beautiful.

Venden: I see * tell the Lord that, couldn't you?

AGM: He knows anyway.

Venden: After all, the words of David.

AGM: That's right. I like ending this way. I think it's very biblical, and Jesus on other occasions may have said such a thing. So I would rather follow our custom, it's a beautiful one, and say the whole prayer.

Venden: As long as it's meaningful and we're thinking about it.

AGM: That's the point anyway. That's it exactly.

Venden: All right. There's something in the Lord's Prayer as we traditionally use it that has puzzled me. When I've been worshiping, for instance, with another church fellowship, some say, "trespasses," "Forgive us our trespasses," and some of us were brought up saying, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Which is right?

AGM: Yes, this was a problem in our home. Growing up in England, it was always "trespasses." So when we moved to this country, we learned "debts" and the younger members of the family all changed, but my father never did. And so even when I took my children home, we would all kneel to pray, and even when they were little, they always knew when praying with Grandpa, it was "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." But when we are home, it's "Forgive us our debts," and I don't recall them ever making a mistake, although I've heard people in church sometimes fumble over this. That's why sometimes the church bulletin will actually say, "The Lord's Prayer (Trespasses) or (Debts).

Venden: Where did the word "trespasses" come from? Is that a particular translation?

AGM: Well, particularly to the English Book of Common Prayer quite an influence on the way some of these things are phrased, including the Messiah. "Why do the heathen so furiously rage together?" You look in vain for that in the King James. It comes out of the Book of Prayer, I believe.

Venden: So maybe the word "trespasses" was taken to get away from the idea that debts had to do with the money problem.

AGM: Yes, rather than sin. I like the translation here, "If we've wronged anyone." The meaning is clear. The variety of words helps us concentrate on the meaning. That's the all important thing.

Venden: Now this is a New English Bible, and it says, "Save us from the evil one." Our familiar phrase, "Deliver us from evil." What's the difference between evil and the evil one?

AGM: The Greek is exactly the same and so to be delivered from the evil one is indeed to be delivered from evil, so it makes no difference. I noticed many versions, though, prefer "the evil one." It brings the great controversy to mind rather vividly. I like it. But either way, the point is clear.

Venden: There's another phrase in here that raises questions many times. I've wondered about this myself. When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," what are really praying? Does that imply - have you ever wondered about this? - God, be careful; please don't get me into temptation?" That God would really want to do that?

AGM: Well one thing that helps is the word "temptation" means trial or testing. Some versions have, "Lead us not into hard testing." The idea that God would tempt is unthinkable as our Heavenly Father. Remember James deals with this. That when we're tempted, don't even blame the devil. He says, "You are led away by your own lusts and enticements." Certainly don't blame God. He wouldn't do any such thing. So "Lead us not into temptation" cannot mean, "Please, don't You tempt us." But "Lead us not into testing," Jesus prayed that in Gethsemane. He said, "Remove this cup from Me if possible." I don't think we should pray, "Lord, I'm ready for it. Bring on the trials; I feel very strong today." I believe we should say, "Lord, in all humility, I mean bring me not into trial; nevertheless, Thy will be done." I think, "Lead us not into testing" must be coupled with, "Nevertheless, Thy will be done." Jesus did it in Gethsemane, and we do it in the Lord's Prayer. You know, the Lord's Prayer and the prayer in Gethsemane are very similar in a number of respects. "Lead us not into testing, Remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, Thy will be done." So I think the prayer in Gethsemane helps understand the Lord's Prayer.

Venden: I want to shift to another area that has been a real problem for many of us. That has to do with language in prayer. Now you've talked about talking to God as with a Friend. And yet I can remember still the shock I felt when in a public prayer a student at our Seminary spoke to God with a familiar "You." I wondered if this young man had lost his way. Now that was some years ago. But really, when we come to church, we usually put on special clothes, something that's just a little different than other times, out of respect. Isn't there an analogy here perhaps as to the kind of language that we ought to use when we talk to Someone who is, well, our Friend, but still we want to show respect, and there is awe and majesty. What about that?

AGM: Well, true, say on Sabbath we come to church and we dress specially to come into the presence of God. But I don't see us wearing antique clothing.

Venden: Oh.

AGM: And so when we come into the presence of God, indeed I believe we should use the best words we know to be reverent, to be respectful, to be clear, but it doesn't mean we use old-fashioned words.

Venden: But isn't that the purpose of the "Thee's" and "Thous?"

AGM: Oh, I believe that has come to be so, but I think people need to realize why they are doing it. Actually, the Thee's and the Thou's and the wist's and the * and the Prithee's and the Trounot's and the Booties and the ouches of gold and all those things--that's the way they all talked those days. Folks should get a hold of the King James' Version and notice the language there is the same. Actually, if the garbage collector were to come in those days,

you would say, "We salute thee, thou gatherer of the refuse, and we prithee that thou wouldst place yonder vessel ere." That's the garbage man. I mean, that's the way you talked to everybody, and you say, "Well, that's no way to talk to God."

Venden: So that language was common language.

AGM: It was the common language of the day. It's beautiful language, but it was not special. What's special now? I think this is a very personal matter. What interests me is that forty years ago I was explaining that there's no justification from the original language in using Thee and Thou and wist and wat. It's true, you can't do that in Greek. You can't do it in Hebrew. And many people objected who now say You. It just interests me because I'm saying Thee and Thou. I'm still doing it. These things have become a symbol of something and I'm still doing it.

Venden: Well you brought it up. I was going to raise that challenge because I noticed that I've shifted over to You, but you are still staying with Thee and Thou. Well now, what about in your personal prayer?

AGM: I'll often say You. Oh yes.

Venden: And you'll feel comfortable with that.

AGM: Oh yes; very much. And I'll have to tell you, I like the way you pray. You say "You," but you say it very reverently; it's in the tone of your voice. It's in your choice of words. So I feel it's very reverent. Now I'm so accustomed to doing this, and there are a number of people I feel might be a little distressed if I switched. I don't want words to be a barrier. Words are our servants, and I will not let them come between. But maybe I'm getting old and I'm too old to shift. I am prepared to do it.

Venden: Well I've gone through a struggle on that, and just now as we're talking, it strikes me that I really made the change after I came here to Loma Linda. There was a time during which

AGM: We did this to you?

Venden: Yes, you did it. There was a time here when I wondered about how this congregation would feel, and I tried to pray, for instance, the invocation prayer at the first of the service, using "Thee" and "Thou," and then maybe at Benediction "You." And I'm thoroughly confused.

AGM: Well, you know, if you upset the audience unduly. I'll never forget when Dr. John Henriques offered the pastoral prayer here one Sabbath morning. And he had just learned the truth about Abba, Father, as a term of endearment; it also means Daddy. And so John prayed, I think it was the day my father was preaching and Dad was very careful about these matters, and John knelt and he said reverently, "Good morning, Dad." And you could just feel the audience in this church of ours. "Good morning, Dad?" But he went right on. I was wondering how my father was holding up. But John meant it very reverently. I think the important thing is, "Rend your heart but not your garments." If the reverence is in here, the language is not the important thing. But I know a number of languages. I love words. I want words to be my servant, and I want to use them with care, and I'm ready to change as need be.

Venden: Well, back to the point that seems to be at the heart of what you're saying this evening, prayer as talking with a Friend really is the crucial thing.

AGM: That's the thing.

Venden: And perhaps our discomfort with language and our dis-ease here will help us to realize that that's really at the heart of it here.

AGM: Language mustn't stand between us and our God. That's the thing.

Venden: We must move on to some other very important questions in this same connection.

This phrase, "Thy will be done." If we really want and mean for God's will to be done, why ask for anything? Wouldn't it be more trusting really to just say, "God, do what You're going to do"?

AGM: Ah, yes. So many things come to mind, but especially watching Jesus do it. He really was an example in almost every important area. He would say to His Father, "Thy will be done; nevertheless..." I think that if prayer is conversation with God, we will be honest with Him. I do not relish what is coming. I want to understand this, and I want You to do things Your way. I want to defer to Your wisdom. Nevertheless, may I talk to You about this? May I tell You honestly I want this, I want that, I shrink from this, I shrink from that? That's real, honest conversation. But behind it all, we are going to defer to God's wisdom. Of course. I think it underscores the idea that it's genuine, honest conversation.

Venden: But to turn that the other way, there are those who express real concern that when you are praying, for example, for someone who is very seriously ill, a loved one that you very much want to be healed, that it's somehow an expression of a lack of faith to after you've said, "Lord, please heal my mother or my child," then to say, "Nevertheless, Thy will be done." Wouldn't it be more trusting to just say, "Lord, heal. I believe You are going to."

AGM: Because we want to tell Him what to do. It would seem to me, it shows much more trust to say, "God, You know best, and You do for this person."

Venden: You're saying then that it's perfectly all right to express my will very forcibly, I mean, to tell God exactly what I want.

AGM: Or I'm not telling the truth. I want this person to be well. This is my mother. Please make her well. Venden: But then is that a lack of trust?

AGM: "Thy will be done" is much more trust.

Venden: Not a lack of faith.

AGM: No, and I love it when the person you are praying for says, "Look, you don't have to dictate to God. He doesn't have to heal me for me to trust Him. I'm willing for Him to do whatever is best, and you may pray that way." And you know from experience, isn't it easy to pray around the bedside when the patient, someone you love especially, trusts God like that. I've had many, many experiences like that. It is very moving. Those who are called to pray for the sick have quite an experience, I think. Don't you find?

Venden: That's true, I should say. But now let's get down to even more practical matters, perhaps. Does it do any good to pray for a safe trip? I've had some friends who were very faithful in this, and I frankly try to be as well.

AGM: Is the trip long enough to deserve it? Is that the way it is? Not just up to the store.

Venden: Going up to the market, why . . .

AGM: Actually there is more hazard going to Alpha Beta on Friday afternoon.

Venden: That's true. But what about this; say, if you were going to head out on a trip, does it really do any good if you pray for example that's another problem here, "Thy will be done," and you have an accident, then do you assume that well, that was what God had in mind on that trip?

AGM: Hmm. See, so long as it isn't a presumptuous prayer that having now prayed, I up the speed ten miles an hour. I'm guaranteed a safe trip; I prayed. I think again it's committing ourselves into God's hands and also praying, "God, help me to drive more carefully. Help me to be more alert. And Lord, whatever comes out of this, I have confidence that all will be well." Some people die on the way to campmeeting and they awaken in the resurrection and here is all the good of the Hereafter awaiting them. And they say, "Wait a minute, Lord. Am I in the Kingdom? This isn't what I wanted. I wanted to be in Soquel." The Lord would say, "Aren't you

really happy to be here?" God guarantees to take care of us, but He doesn't say, "No trouble, no sickness, no accidents on this planet." This is a dangerous place to live.

Venden: You're not saying then that God planned an accident and that He had that all set up if something like that should happen.

AGM: That's right. By all means.

Venden: He's that kind of Lord.

AGM: He could step in, though, at any time, but He doesn't. He could. He's trying to say something about the order and the results of disorder, and there's an enemy abroad, and He hopes we'll bear with Him and wait. And then, when we look back over all this, we would not wish to have been led in any other way. So He hopes we trust Him enough for that.

Venden: In this matter of praying for others, the matter of intercessory prayer, does that really do any good?

AGM: That's an interesting phrase, "Does it do any good?" That's a very good way to put it. See, you know we always want to not miss out on any good thing. We want to get our money's worth here, you know.

Venden: Isn't that the wrong way to put that.

AGM: Well, it doesn't seem like prayer is conversation with God as with a Friend. It seems to me, to be specific, here's a mother with a son who has chosen to go his own way. She loves her son. And so every night she talks to God about her son. If she didn't, she wouldn't be normal. She loves her son. So you talk with God about the things that are on your mind, and you don't say, "God, force my boy back." And we know that if God would pour out His Holy Spirit with one hundred-fold greater intensity on the son, it would not make him a Christian. He could still say, "No." So we're still saying, "God, You choose the time. You choose the way. Help me to be patient. Help me to do what I can do and maybe bring every influence possible to bear, but I know my son can still say 'No,' as Lucifer said 'No' to Your very face." See, we understand that as we pray, but I'm not going to say it does no good to talk to God. I'm going to talk to Him any. This is my son. I'm going to talk to Him about my son.

Venden: But, for example, if there is a particular need, I remember from years ago when there was a situation in one of the countries of Europe where people were suffering persecution and doors were being closed to churches. And we had a day of fasting and prayer.

AGM: I remember that.

Venden: Do you remember that?

AGM: Very much so.

Venden: Now if we were to join together to pray, does our joining in a kind of special movement of prayer mean special power to bring about?

AGM: So long as it wouldn't mean the more of us twist God's arm, the more likely we are to get what we want. The time that this occurred, a whole group of theology majors at PUC - I was still up there in the 1950's when this occurred - they said, "Let's meet for lunch every Monday noon and discuss this until we're satisfied." And we agreed finally that within the limitations of the great controversy, with an enemy there accusing God of interfering and manipulating things, and with angels deservng to understand, I believe our united requests set God free to do things He had been longing to do. Because when we all together said, "Please, will You open the churches in Romania," or wherever it was, God could say to the adversary, "Step aside. I'm on My way." And He could say to the angels, "Is this interference? Is this manipulation? Do you

hear them all asking Me?" I think the great controversy is very much involved here, and I wonder then, if more of us would unite in asking God for these things, if we might not set Him free more frequently to be able to say to the adversary, "Step aside, I'm being asked to do this." And He could do it. So I believe our prayer set Him free to do this.

Venden: They do make a real difference.

AGM: Yes. We should do it anyway.

Venden: But what about an individual? If we were to join together and pray for the conversion of an individual, you referred to this earlier, but could we compel, would God have to answer that prayer so this person would, in fact, be converted?

AGM: See immediately what that would say about God. If God by force can keep His family together, how did He lose one third of the angels?

Venden: It really gets at the whole issue, doesn't it?

AGM: Absolutely. God will not bring such pressure on my son.

Venden: You referred to Romans 8 in the Bible Reference Sheet. Now, that goes on to say something about how the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, or I noticed in the New International Version, "With groans that words cannot express." What's happening there? What's the Spirit doing with God on our behalf?

AGM: Well, see, with God, immediately we need to remember John 16:26. If there is no need for the Son to intercede with the Father for us, there's no need for the Holy Spirit to intercede with the Father for us. They're all Three on our side. And I'm impressed that Bible students through the years have agreed on what this means. That the Holy Spirit of truth comes and helps us to pray by bringing us the truth about God, that we might be encouraged to pray. He also brings us the truth about ourselves and helps us be honest and tell the truth. He helps us tell the truth in prayer to God as He really is, and that's prayer that makes a difference. So in a way, the Holy Spirit through our groans, in a way, He is inspiring us to desire these things very much. He's the One who guides us into true conversation with God as with a Friend. Venden: I have heard rather recently several individuals, one a fairly well-known minister in our country here, talking about how God speaks to him. Now what about that? How do you judge that kind of thing? You talked about prayer. It ought to be, if it's conversation as with a Friend. You ought to have a two-way conversation, not just a monologue. What about God speaking to us? AGM: When someone comes and says, "God spoke to me last night," I mustn't be rude enough to say, "I think that's a lie." But I must remember verses we considered earlier in our Conversations, that prophet who said, "'The angel of the Lord has told me thus and so,' but he lied to him." I must go, though, if this person says, "God spoke to me in my study last night or here or there, and I bring you this message," I must take that message to the Scriptures and see if it measures up. For no matter who it is that comes to me with a message from the Lord, though he may say, "The Lord spoke to me last night," I still must take that message to the Scriptures. Well, if I'm taking that message to the Scriptures, what is the highest authority, but the Scriptures? Then why not go straight there? I believe God speaks to us primarily through the Scriptures.

Venden: OK, I thought that's what I heard you saying earlier on, that as far as the two-way conversation, God has already spoken and He is speaking in His word at the present time.

AGM: And He has spoken to individuals, indeed. And I think we've taken the messages of some of them to the Bible, and they've measured up. One person you and I know especially well, what she wrote measures up magnificently. That's where the authority lies. But I test what she wrote by Scriptures.

Venden: It's time for just a couple of quick questions. Should we pray to the Father, the Son and/or the Holy Spirit? To all Three?

AGM: All Three, as in the Doxology. We praise the Father, we praise the Son, we praise the Holy Spirit.

Venden: What about praying in the name of Jesus? What is the meaning or significance of that, the importance of that?

AGM: I think it's significant Jesus said, "Pray to the Father in My name, and the Spirit will help you do it." I think that's for historical reasons, you see. The Son is the One who came to reveal the truth about the Father. The Spirit gives us the record and brings the confirmation. And so to be in tune with the whole history of the revelation, He says, "Pray to the Father but in My name," and "in My name" is not a formula, certainly not an indication for the choir to get ready for the closing response. It's rather, I recognize that if Jesus had not come, I would not know You, I wouldn't have the courage to come. I wouldn't know how to pray. So "in His name" is a statement of gratitude and worship.

Venden: Can you say just a word on this question that has come up about prayers that God says He won't hear? For example, in Isaiah 1:15, "You spread forth your hands. I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen." What kind of prayers does God refuse to hear?

AGM: Ah, that's most significant. In I John it says a similar thing. The prayer of hypocrisy, the prayer that really isn't asking for any help, the prayer that is cheating with God. What else can God do? Now He loves the cheating prayer; He loves the hypocrite. He simply cannot help them, and so He says, "I will have to give you up." So prayer must be honest. We must walk humbly with our God and tell the truth. Same way with a physician. A physician cannot help a cheating patient who won't tell the truth, and God is the same.

Venden: OK, I've got to get in a quick word for our television audience regarding Can God Be Trusted? We're offering this book if people will write to: The University Church here in Loma Linda, 92354 ZIP code and ask for this book. We'll be happy to send them a copy, and it really helps to bring together our entire series. Just a quick word too about next, Number Sixteen in our series. What's our topic?

AGM: The next one is "God's Last Pleading With His Children," and as some could guess, that would be reviewing the Three Angels' Messages in the setting of the Great Controversy.

Venden: So that moves us toward the conclusion of our series.

AGM: That's right. The next one is "Satan's Final Effort To Deceive."

Venden: So thank you, and we'll look forward to next Friday night.