

# Course Companions Sample Commentary

## Song of Prayer Supplement

### The Circumstances and the Guidance That Led up to The Song of Prayer

*The Song of Prayer: Prayer, Forgiveness, Healing* is the second supplement to *A Course in Miracles* that was scribed by Helen Schucman (the first being *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice*). It was dictated from September to November of 1977. The circumstances from which it arose are described in *Absence from Felicity*, Ken Wapnick's story of Helen Schucman and her scribing of the Course.

There, Ken discussed at length his longstanding discomfort with the practice that Helen and Bill had of asking for specific guidance, a practice in which he, and later Judy Skutch, joined them. Here are some of his remarks about that (found on pp. 441-442 in *Absence from Felicity*):

For some time I had been feeling uneasy over our manner and practice of "asking." This discomfort referred first of all to Helen's and Bill's meditating and asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit for very specific help in matters such as times to meet, street corners to stand on for taxi-cabs, whether to attend certain meetings, and the like....

After we met Judy, the practice of asking for specifics continued, and if anything, seemed to increase with all the practical decisions that needed resolution. Quite frequently during our afternoon meetings at Judy's apartment, the four of us would sit quietly and "ask" specifically what we should do regarding the Course. While we frequently would receive answers, and often the same ones (after all, minds *are* joined), I continued to feel uncomfortable with the process. It all seemed so magical, and while I did not believe the phenomenon in and of itself was necessarily invalid, it did seem to be somewhat less than what we were capable of doing, especially Helen.

His discomfort lay in his feeling that this emphasis on Jesus as "not much more than an information giver" was a defense against Jesus' abstract love and peace, which were clearly the priority. He also said that he felt they were deceiving themselves about the real nature of this guidance seeking. He suspected that it was really a use of "psychic ability," rather than "true spirituality."

As a result, Helen and Ken had many discussions about this topic between 1973 and 1977. Finally, in the fall of 1977, Helen received first a special message from Jesus about this issue of asking, followed by *The Song of Prayer* supplement itself.

In today's commentary, I will comment paragraph by paragraph on that initial special message that Helen received. It is not part of *The Song of Prayer*. Rather, it is found in *Absence from Felicity* (pp. 444-450), and the final half of it (the last three paragraphs) is also in Helen's notes.

Asking is holy, and it is holy because it is a way of reaching God. He is the Answer because you are in need of an Answer. You can ask for another and receive the Answer for him. [Based on Helen's Notes for the latter paragraphs, "Answer" probably should be lower case here.] But you can, and indeed you must, help him by offering your love and support that his asking be holy and his true need recognized. That is prayer; it is the same for yourself or for another. There is no difference. If only you received the answers for another, there would be a difference.

This first paragraph addresses an issue in Helen's life. As Helen's abilities became more known, people were asking her to seek guidance for them, a role that she was uncomfortable with. Indeed, her very first discourse from Jesus, the day before the Course started coming through back in October of 1965, was in part about her discomfort in receiving guidance for Bill. There, Helen eventually came to this realization: "You have every right, in fact, you *should*, ask me to ask for you. This is *not* a selfish gift, and *it is* a real one (this upsets me, too). It *has* to be used for others, and *particularly* you."

The tone in this new guidance, however, is different, suggesting perhaps that Helen's gift should be on tap for Bill but not necessarily for everyone. Jesus does say, "You can ask for another and receive the Answer for him." However, this is then followed by two important qualifiers.

First, asking should be seen only secondarily as a way of getting specific answers. Primarily, it is a way of reaching God. He is our true need.

Second, when another wants you to ask for him, you should ask *with* him. If you were the only one asking and hearing, that would simply emphasize the differences between you. So ask with him, and while you do, offer him "your love and support that his asking be holy and his true need recognized." In other words, support and lift up his asking, so that he hears the answer within himself, but even more importantly, so that his asking will reach for the true Answer: God.

This does not mean that you cannot get messages for another, if it is God Who chooses this way of reaching him. This will usually happen unexpectedly, generally in the form of a sudden feeling that you have something to tell him; a message to deliver. You have not been wrong in the past about how you have asked, but you are ready for a step ahead now. There are joint decisions in which unanimity of response is a good indication of authenticity. This should not be abandoned. But asking is a lesson in trust, and no one can trust for another. He can only strengthen another's trust by offering it to him and having faith in his ability to hear for himself.

The first paragraph described a scenario in which another person wants you to ask for guidance on his or her behalf. This second paragraph describes a different scenario, one that is treated as more ideal than the first. In this scenario, God decides that He wants to use you to get a message to someone else. In other words, He is the One initiating the process. From your point of view, then, the process happens "unexpectedly," often as "a sudden feeling that you have something to tell him; a message to deliver." We clearly need to be alert and responsive to these events. If God has decided that we are the receptive channel through which He can speak an important message to someone, we don't want to sit on the message and fail to pass it on.

The paragraph then transitions and addresses Ken Wapnick's concerns more directly: "You have not been wrong in the past about how you have asked." This openly says that there was in fact nothing wrong with their practice of asking. And how could there have been? They were simply doing what the Course tells us to do throughout: ask for guidance about everything.

However, there's more: "but you are ready for a step ahead now." There is a higher relationship with asking, for which they are now ready.

Jesus then says that "There are joint decisions in which unanimity of response is a good indication of authenticity." They have decisions to make as a group about the Course's life in the world. In such cases, the fact that they all receive the same answer is "a good indication" that they got the real stuff. (Note that this seems different from Ken Wapnick's explanation that everyone could get the same thing merely because "after all, minds *are* joined," not because the information was real guidance.) Given that it is proper to ask together and that getting the same thing indicates authenticity, they should keep seeking guidance as a group: "This should not be abandoned."

"But," Jesus says, "asking is a lesson in trust, and no one can trust for another." There is, again, something not quite right about leaning on someone else's guidance, even in a group setting.

Each person needs to develop his or her own right relationship with asking, in which God is trusted and is indeed the Answer sought. Someone like Helen should not just receive messages for another (or for the group), but should also “strengthen another’s trust by offering it to him and having faith in his ability to hear for himself.” Helen, in other words, should help lift him up as he aspires to reach the summit of right asking.

Asking is the way to God because it offers you His Will as He would have you hear it. We will have a series of lessons on asking because you have not understood it. But do not think because of that, that you have been mistaken in your attempts. You have done well and will do better.

Asking is not as simple and straightforward as we assume. It is ultimately a way of simply opening up to God and letting Him convey His will to you “as He would have you hear it.” Because the real nature of asking is so different than what we have assumed, Helen and company need “a series of lessons on asking” - *The Song of Prayer* supplement that Jesus is about to deliver. But just because they had not fully understood this subtle matter doesn’t mean that they had been “mistaken in [their] attempts.” He says, “You have done well and will do better.” Yes, they can do better. *But they have also done well.*

Any specific question involves a large number of assumptions which inevitably limit the answer. A specific question actually is a decision about the kind of answer that is acceptable. The purpose of words is to limit, and by limiting to make a vast area of experience more manageable. But that means manageable by *you*. For many aspects of living in this world that is necessary. But not for asking. God does not use words, and does not answer in words. He can only “speak” to the Christ in you, Who translates His answer into whatever language you can understand and accept. Sometimes words will limit fear; sometimes not. That is why some people hear words, some receive feelings of inner conviction, and some do not become aware of anything. Yet God has answered, and His answer will reach you when you are ready.

This paragraph is a brilliant and important discussion of the mechanics of formulating a question. When we ask God for an answer, we assume that the question is obvious. “Should I take this job?” “Should I move to this neighborhood?” But it’s not as simple as that. When we form a question, we face “a vast area of experience,” about which there is a dizzying number of questions that *could* be asked. There are so many that it’s paralyzing. It’s like thumbing through a restaurant menu that’s a hundred pages long.

We, therefore, try to crunch this unmanageable area down into a specific question, a question that we state in just a few words. We take a vast and stormy sea and condense it down into a teacup.

This sounds necessary and proper, but unbeknownst to us, the process is guided by “a large number of assumptions” that are both highly subjective and largely unconscious. With the guidance of their invisible hand, the proper question seems completely obvious to us. Yet a moment’s thought would reveal to us that a spiritual master would have seen a different question to ask, a ten-year-old would have seen another question, and we ourselves two weeks from now may see yet another one. And what if *none* of these questions are the right one?

Unmindful of any of this, we take the question that we assume to be *the* question and we see it as an opening, a window that lets the light shine in. Yet in fact it is a limitation, a heavy curtain over the window that could be, for it shuts out all those other potential questions. It says that only the answers that address *this* question are acceptable. All those other answers need not apply.

But let’s face it, the likelihood is that one of those other questions, not ours, was the right question. Indeed, one of the most common experiences in receiving guidance is that it answers a question you didn’t ask—a slightly different one or an entirely different one. Once this real answer shows up, your question is then revealed to be somewhat misguided, even wrongheaded. You realize in hindsight that your question wasn’t the first step toward solution, but was instead an expression of the problem.

We shouldn’t assume, then, that the prayer process hinges on our ability to boil that “vast area of experience” down to a few simple words. After all, God doesn’t even use words. He gives His wordless answer to the Christ in us, Who then translates that answer into whatever form allows us to hear it without fear. Sometimes words allow us to hear without fear. Sometimes we just get a feeling “of inner conviction.” And there are any number of other forms in which the answer can come to us. And sometimes, of course, we are too afraid to receive the answer in *any* form. “Yet,” Jesus says, “God has answered, and His answer will reach you when you are ready.”

Answers are not up to you. Any limit you place on them interferes with hearing. God’s Voice is silent and speaks in silence. That means that you do not phrase the question and you do not restrict the answer.

When Jesus says, "Any limit you place on them interferes with hearing," the limit he is referring to, of course, is our question. As we have just seen, our question implies that the only appropriate answer is one that answers *it*. Yet answers come from God. He knows the answer we need to hear. If you were meeting with an all-knowing doctor who could tell you literally anything about what's wrong with your body and how to fix it, would you say, "How do I cure my dandruff?" Or would you say, "Okay, what do I need to know?"

Asking is prayer. It is not a demand. It is not questioning. It is not limitation. The only real request is for God's Answer. It needs the humility of trust, not the arrogance of false certainty. Trust cannot lie in idols, for that is merely faith in magic. Trust requires faith that God understands, knows, and will answer. It means a state of peace. For this you can safely ask. In fact, if you do not feel that you have it, asking for it is the only real request you can make.

If we ask our laser-focused question, which shuts out all that God might really want to tell us, is that really asking? Isn't mistrust at the heart of our question? It essentially says, "Look, unless I put some parameters on Your answer, You could well give me some irrelevant, bizarre answer that completely ignored my real need here. Unless I give You a target, Your arrow could land a mile away in the woods."

Is that the way to approach God? Don't we at that point turn Him into that genie from *The Secret*? "Asking." Jesus says, "is prayer." It is not rubbing the lamp and commanding that our will be done. It is approach to God. We need to come before our God in the spirit of true prayer, humbly trusting that He, being our Creator, knows us and our need far better than we ever could.

We need, then, to approach Him in the peace that comes from genuine trust. And if we don't have that peace, then the best thing we can do is to ask Him to give it to us.

*This commentary was written by Robert Perry, editor of the Complete and Annotated Edition of A Course in Miracles, for the Course Companions online learning program. Course Companions is offered by the Circle of Atonement and can be found online at [coursecompanions.com](http://coursecompanions.com).*