

**Optional Study and Practice Suggestions for Recording 469A,
“Second Stage of Our Unfoldment”**

1) *This Session in Context*

The 1962 Chicago Closed Class gives a clear and practical explanation of the stages of spiritual development. In Session 1, “Discovery of My Self,” and Session 2, “Preparation for Prayer,” Joel focused on foundational spiritual principles—the nature of individual being, the nature of God, and the nature of prayer. In this third session, Joel begins to explain the three stages that we experience in our spiritual evolution and the practices that mark those stages.

2) *Summary of the Class*

We always encourage you to write your own summary of the class, because each person will select the points most important to them. However, if it is helpful to you as a quick review, you are welcome to use this summary of recording 469A.

Since God is the all-power, why is there sin, disease, death, wars, and other discords? The answer forms the foundation of our work: “The natural man receiveth not the things of God.” This “natural man” is you in your human state as you were born, and the natural man is not and cannot be under the law of God. You will remain this “natural man” **unless** “the Spirit of God dwells in you.” In other words, something must take place in your life that changes you from being the natural man, the man of earth, to being the child of God, who is under the government of God, and who is heir of God, joint heir to all the heavenly riches.

This “something” that must take place in your life is your **conscious awareness of the transcendental Presence**, which has been called “the Christ,” “the Buddha mind,” “the mind that was in Christ Jesus,” “the Tao,” and other names. It has no race, religion, or creed. It is spiritual, the spirit of God, and since there is only one God, this same Presence can rise up in any individual and transform them from the man of earth to “that man who has his being in Christ.”

You attain this conscious awareness of your spiritual Sonship, of that transcendental Presence, only **by a transition in your consciousness**. Anyone can make that transition **if** they find a way to open their consciousness to the outflow of the Spirit that is already within them. A teacher and a teaching can give you a foundation in spiritual principles and can lift you in consciousness so that you can spiritually discern truth and make this transition. But you are the one who has to make the transition.

In our human estate, we suffer sins, diseases, lacks, and limitations because we are living as “branches of a tree, cut off, that wither and die.” We are subject to the beliefs and superstitions of the world, subject to good and evil, subject to external forces and powers. As human beings, we are renewed only by material food and drink. We use up our strength because we are not being renewed and fed spiritually day by day.

The Infinite Way message is intended to reunite us with the Tree of Life. Whereas of myself, I am nothing, as a branch of the Tree of Life united with the Source of the tree, I am fed and renewed by that Source. All that the tree is, I am. All that the tree has, I have, and I will bear fruit richly.

Your spiritual unfoldment begins when you become aware that there is a God—not a God far off, or the God taught in the churches, or the God you hope will do something for you. You become aware of a real God, a God that is “closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet,” a God that can come into your experience now, while you are on earth. This God is a Presence and a Power right at hand. You can call it the “Father within,” the “indwelling Christ,” the “Spirit of God,” “Tao,” or “Buddha,” but regardless of the label, what you are talking about is an actual spiritual Presence that you become aware of **within you**.

You begin to realize that there is an indwelling Something, a Presence, a Power, and that It “performs that which is given me to do.” It “goes before me to make the crooked places straight.” It feeds me; It clothes me. You begin to acknowledge and recognize the presence of God within you, and this acknowledgment starts to change the nature of your life. Now, instead of waking in the morning and wondering what is going to happen during the day, **you** determine what the day will bring. The moment you awaken, you acknowledge this Presence within you. You acknowledge that this Presence goes before you and walks beside you. You acknowledge this Presence as the **only** power governing your affairs. In other words, you withdraw power consciously from anything external, such as weather, climate, food, germs, or infection.

You can only experience this transition from the man of earth to the man who has his being in Christ **through the activity in your consciousness**. So you must **practice** abiding in the Word and letting the Word abide in you, not just hear it and say, “Isn’t it beautiful? I hope it’s true.” You must actually **live** in the Word, and **dwell** in the secret place of the Most High. When you acknowledge the one infinite Power, you recognize that It is not up in the sky. It is **within you**, indifferent to goodness or badness, operating continuously to change any badness to goodness, any disease to health. Your acknowledgment of this infinite Presence and Power makes It the only power that functions in your life.

This is practicing the presence of God, acknowledging Him in all your ways, leaning not to your own understanding. You live and move and have your being constantly in the awareness of this indwelling Presence. In due course, you notice the fruitage of this Presence. Sometimes students notice fruitage right away; for others, it takes longer. But the start is made **on the day you become aware that there is a God right at hand**, waiting to reveal divine harmony, peace, and grace to you.

Eventually, we move from acknowledging the Presence to the actual **experience** of the Presence itself, and **this experience is the goal of our work**. When you experience the Presence, you are no longer “man whose breath is in his nostrils,” or “the man of earth.” You are now “that man who has his being in Christ.” Like Paul, you know that “I can do all things through Christ, which dwelleth in me. I live, yet not I; Christ dwelleth in me. Christ liveth my life.” This Christ, this indwelling Presence, is at hand right now. We do not have to wait until we die, or we are good, or healthy, or wealthy, to experience It. This God is **within me**, not some place far off, and It brings healing, comfort, and reform. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is fulfillment.” “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

So the **first step** in your transition from being “the man of earth,” to being “that man who has his being in Christ;” is the **acknowledgment of this indwelling Presence**. The **second step** is **living morning to night in contemplation of the Spirit within**. You abide in the Word, contemplating the wellspring of life and the power of resurrection within you that can restore anything in your life that has been destroyed. You look more to the grace of God for your good than to human sources. You rely more on the Creator than on the creature.

Then this Invisible within appears visibly as your health, your supply, your companionship, and the fulfillment of your needs, for when we are restored to the Tree of Life, whatever is the nature of the tree is the nature of my demonstration—immortality, infinite abundance, oneness with every other branch. Even as we live the contemplative life, we still go out and do the work that is given to us to do, whatever it may be. We do it better than ever before, because we know that we will not advance out of where we are until we are doing perfectly that which is given us to do today.

Meditation is key to making this transition, because by contemplating the letter of truth, you are led beyond it into the intuitive. You work with the letter of truth, and then one day when you are not thinking, suddenly the transition is made, and you are aware of the Presence within you. You know that you are no longer alone. You can retire into this Presence, commune with It, listen to It. This Presence lives your life. It changes your life from one that is subject to chance and change to one in which you have dominion over your experience.

3) Acknowledge and Practice the Presence

In this class session, Joel focuses on acknowledging the Presence within us and then “practicing the Presence” through the contemplative life. It is a clarion call to practice, practice, practice: Practice remembering and acknowledging the Presence in all our ways; practice contemplating truth; practice listening for the still small voice; practice meditation. These practices all purify the mind and move us steadily toward illumination.

Some students say that they would like to be more diligent about continuously practicing the Presence, but that they get so involved in the business of their everyday human life that they simply forget.

Building a Habit

For most people, practicing the Presence is a habit to be developed, and experts have given us good ideas about how to build a habit. Sometimes we simply don’t think about applying this advice to building a spiritual habit, but building a habit is building a habit, whether it be spiritual or material. A habit is simply a behavior that has been repeated enough times to become automatic. That is what we are striving to do with practicing the Presence. We want it to become automatic—not automatic in the sense of doing it mindlessly, but automatic in the sense that we naturally and continuously keep our mind stayed on God, on truth.

How to Build a Habit

Experts say that two key principles in developing a habit are (1) making it obvious and (2) making it easy. To make it obvious, some suggest “habit stacking,” which simply means identifying something that you already do, and then “stacking” the new behavior on top. In other words, every time I do X, I will do Y. Interestingly enough, this is essentially the strategy that

Joel suggests when he recommends that before we eat or drink anything during the day, we turn within to practice the Presence and acknowledge the Christ, or when he suggests that whenever we go through a doorway, we pause for a second to acknowledge the Presence.

This is a very helpful tactic. Most of us eat several meals and snacks each day, drink beverages throughout the day, and go through doorways several times, so those can easily become activities with which we associate practicing the Presence. These days, most of us use our smartphones many, many times a day, and that could be another opportunity to “stack.” We can take just a few seconds to acknowledge the Presence just before or after we use the smartphone.

To make it easy to build a habit, experts say that we should give ourselves cues and make them obvious; make them stand out. Cues might come from placing in your environment beautiful, eye-catching reminder cards with quotations or images that speak to your spiritual sense. Or you can use a repeat timer app with a pleasing sound on your smartphone to give you the cue to take a few minutes or a few seconds to turn within. Some of you may recall that before the days of smartphones, Virginia Stephenson suggested setting a kitchen timer for every twenty minutes to remind yourself to turn within and build that habit of practicing the Presence. Technology changes, but principle is the same. The idea is to create an environment where practicing the Presence is as easy as possible.

Sometimes students start out with such strong resolve to practice the Presence and such zeal for doing it that they try to do too much and become discouraged. While some people may be able to meditate or contemplate for ten or fifteen minutes out of every hour, that is not realistic for most people. Two minutes of contemplation every hour or ten seconds every twenty minutes is far more manageable and has the benefit of developing real consistency in practicing the Presence.

Experts say that when you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do. This fits perfectly with Joel’s advice to do “ten-second meditations.” On Recording 475A, “Ten Second Meditations,” Joel speaks eloquently about developing this habit of taking ten seconds many times a day to pause and practice the Presence. If you have not heard that recording recently, you might find it worthwhile to listen to it. Of course, as Joel says, we still need the longer periods of meditation sometime during the day, but the frequent, shorter pauses will be a great help in building the habit of practicing the Presence.

4) Bible Quotations

Once again in this class session, Joel uses many Biblical quotations to illustrate and support the lesson. As you listen to the class again, you might like to make a note of these and use them in the ten-second meditations or as the basis for longer contemplations.