

Be Perfect Even as God Is Perfect

*Understanding the Father's Mandate and the Eternal
Journey of Becoming Godlike*

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Be Perfect Even as God Is Perfect: Understanding the Father's Mandate and the Eternal Journey of Becoming Godlike

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This book is a work of spiritual reflection and interpretation. References to *The Urantia Book* are included for study and discussion. Supplementary received messages cited in this work are identified separately in the References section and should not be understood as part of *The Urantia Book*.

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Source Note

This book is principally grounded in the theological and cosmological framework presented in *The Urantia Book*, with particular attention to its teachings concerning the Universal Father, Thought Adjusters, free will, the evolving soul, the ascension career, the life and teachings of Jesus, and the mandate to become perfect as the Father is perfect.

A collection of received spiritual messages has also been consulted throughout the book. These messages include teachings attributed to Thought Adjusters, the Beloved One, Ophelius, Uteah, Prolotheos, and other teachers, as received through individuals identified in the References section. They are used as supplementary reflections and practical illustrations of themes explored in the primary source.

These two categories of material are intentionally distinguished. The supplementary messages are not presented as portions of *The Urantia Book*, nor are they used to replace its theological framework. When the sources address similar subjects, *The Urantia Book* remains the principal foundation for the interpretation developed in this work.

The purpose of this book is not to establish a new doctrine of perfection but to explore a question that arises naturally from the Father's mandate: How can an imperfect evolutionary creature genuinely be commanded to become perfect as God is perfect?

The chapters that follow approach that question through free will, divine guidance, experience, character formation, love, service, the example of Jesus, the Thought Adjuster, and the long ascending journey toward the Universal Father.

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Introduction — The Invitation to Become

Among the teachings concerning humanity's relationship with God, few are as challenging as the command to become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect. At first encounter, the mandate seems to create an impossible comparison. On one side stands the Universal Father, eternal and perfect. On the other stands the evolutionary human being, limited in knowledge, inexperienced in the greater realities of the universe, vulnerable to error, and only beginning the long development of spiritual character. How can one reasonably be commanded to become like the other?¹

The difficulty becomes even greater when perfection is understood according to ordinary human standards. We commonly use the word *perfect* to describe something without mistakes or defects. Applied spiritually, this understanding can turn the Father's mandate into a demand for immediate flawlessness. Every weakness then appears to contradict the command, every mistake becomes evidence of failure, and spiritual development can become dominated by anxiety rather than hope.

But an evolutionary creature cannot honestly begin from completion. We begin unfinished. That fact is not an accident standing in opposition to the divine plan; it is part of the very meaning of evolutionary existence. We possess capacities that must develop, values that must become character, decisions that must become experience, and spiritual possibilities that can become actual only through living.

The command to become perfect must therefore be understood in relation to the kind of beings to whom the command is given. The Father does not address already perfected creatures and order them to become what they already are. He addresses evolutionary children and reveals their destination.

That distinction changes everything.

Perfection can then be understood not as the denial of our present condition but as the fulfillment of our divine potential. The mandate establishes the destination while the universe career provides the journey. We may choose that destination before we possess it. We may consecrate our will to the Father while still learning what the Father's will means in the countless circumstances of experience. We may begin becoming Godlike long before we have achieved anything resembling completed perfection.²

This is why free will occupies such an important place in the pages that follow. If the Father simply imposed perfection upon the creature, character would not develop through meaningful choice. The evolutionary journey allows truth to be recognized, goodness to be chosen, love to be practiced, wisdom to emerge from experience, and divine guidance to be freely accepted. The creature does not create the destination, but the creature participates in the journey.³

Within that journey, *The Urantia Book* presents an extraordinary idea: the Father whom we seek is not merely waiting at the distant end of the ascent. Through the Thought Adjuster, the divine presence accompanies the mortal from within. The One who calls the creature toward perfection also provides inward guidance toward that perfection. Divine purpose and human freedom therefore meet within the developing life of the individual.⁴

Jesus gives this principle a human face. His life demonstrates what wholehearted dedication to the Father can look like within the conditions of human existence. His example does not require us to reproduce the external circumstances of his life. Rather, it reveals an orientation that can become ours: trust in the Father, dedication to divine will, courage, mercy, love, service, and recognition of the spiritual value of every person.⁵

The journey described in this book consequently moves in two directions at once. It reaches outward toward an immense eternal destiny while continually returning to the circumstances of today. Paradise may represent the distant goal, but today's choices are already part of the road toward it. Family life, work, relationships, disappointment, forgiveness, responsibility, service, failure, courage, and quiet communion with God all become part of the education of an ascending personality.

This also means that mistakes must be understood correctly. They are not goals, and spiritual growth should never become an excuse for irresponsible behavior. Yet an evolutionary being learns partly through imperfect attempts. A failure honestly recognized can produce wisdom. A wrong choice can be followed by repentance, correction, and a better choice. A person who falls can rise with greater understanding than before.

Perfectionism cannot make proper sense of this process because perfectionism demands the appearance of completion. Evolutionary perfection allows development. It requires sincerity without pretending that sincerity has already produced maturity. It permits patience without complacency and responsibility without self-condemnation.

One of the central arguments of this book can therefore be stated simply: **perfection is the destination, not perfectionism.**

The decision concerning that destination can be made now. We can decide that we want the Father's way. We can choose truth over falsehood, goodness over selfishness, mercy over resentment, courage over fear, service over indifference, and love over separation. We will not make every choice perfectly, but every sincere choice can contribute to the formation of character.

The journey is much longer than mortal life. Within the ascension framework explored in these chapters, death does not magically transform an unfinished evolutionary personality into a completely perfected creature. The education continues. Experience continues. Growth continues. The universe career provides the stages through which the creature can progressively approach the destiny announced in the Father's mandate.⁶

This larger horizon relieves us of an impossible burden without relieving us of responsibility. We do not need to achieve the perfection of the ages today. But today is part of those ages. What we choose now matters precisely because the eternal journey has already begun.

The mandate is given now. The decision can be made now. The transformation begins now. But the achievement of perfection is the work of the ages.⁷

The chapters that follow explore what this means: what perfection is, how the Father's will relates to human freedom, why the divine presence within matters, how choices become character, what Jesus

reveals about living in relationship with the Father, why ordinary life is a spiritual classroom, how love and service participate in Godlikeness, why practice matters, and how mortal existence belongs to a destiny extending far beyond the present world.

The purpose is not to convince the reader that perfection is easy. It is to show why it is possible. The distance is great, but there is a road.

Chapter 1 — The Supreme Mandate

There are few statements about human destiny more challenging than the Father's command to his evolutionary children: "Be you perfect, even as I am perfect." At first, the words can seem almost impossible. We know ourselves too well. We know our impatience, our fears, our selfish impulses, our failures, and the many occasions when we recognize what is right yet fail to live according to what we know. We make decisions with incomplete understanding. We misunderstand other people and sometimes ourselves. We become discouraged, react without thinking, and occasionally repeat mistakes we believed we had already overcome. How, then, can an imperfect human being possibly be commanded to become perfect as God is perfect?⁸

The answer begins by understanding what the command actually means. The mandate is not a demand that a mortal human being somehow acquire the infinite perfection of the Universal Father during one brief earthly lifetime. God possesses an absolute and infinite perfection that a finite creature cannot duplicate. The Father's command must therefore be understood according to the nature and capacity of the creature receiving it. The goal is not for the creature to become God, but to become increasingly Godlike. This distinction transforms what initially appears to be an impossible demand into an extraordinary statement about human destiny.⁹

The command establishes a destination. It tells us where the long journey of human existence is ultimately going and gives direction to our freedom, meaning to our experiences, and purpose to our spiritual development. We are not expected to possess today the perfection that belongs at the end of an immense ascension career. We are invited to begin moving toward that perfection today. The difference is essential, because if we interpret the command as requiring immediate flawlessness, spiritual life can easily become a source of anxiety. Every mistake then appears to be evidence that we are failing, every weakness

becomes something to condemn, and every moment of anger, impatience, discouragement, or selfishness seems to separate us from an unreachable divine standard.

Evolutionary perfection does not work that way. The creature who is becoming perfect must necessarily begin imperfect. Growth requires something that has not finished growing, just as experience requires circumstances in which choices actually matter. Character develops because we encounter real alternatives and must decide among them. Courage develops because uncertainty exists. Forgiveness becomes meaningful because something has happened that needs to be forgiven. Patience develops where impatience is possible, and love acquires moral significance because we remain free to withhold it. Our present imperfection, therefore, does not prove that the Father's command has failed. It provides the very environment in which the journey toward perfection can begin.

Although perfection cannot be completely attained during mortal life, the decision for perfection can be made now. A human being can sincerely decide to know God, to seek the Father's will, and to become increasingly like him. Such a decision does not instantly remove human weakness, produce complete wisdom, or prevent future mistakes. What it does is establish direction. A traveler may stand thousands of miles from a destination, and choosing that destination does not mean the traveler has already arrived. Yet once the destination has genuinely been chosen, every subsequent decision can be considered according to whether it moves the traveler toward that destination or away from it. In the same way, the command to become perfect gives human freedom an ultimate direction. The mandate is given now, the decision can be made now, and the transformation can begin now, even though the complete achievement of perfection remains the work of the ages.¹⁰

This brings us naturally to one of the central ideas of spiritual life: the will of the Father. If perfection means progressively becoming more like God, then the path toward perfection necessarily involves learning to choose what is consistent with God's character and purposes. This does not mean abandoning our personality or becoming spiritually passive. God did not give us free will so that we could cease using it. The higher purpose of human will is not its destruction but its consecration. The words "Your will be done" therefore represent much

more than religious language. They express a voluntary orientation of the human personality toward God.¹¹

Those words are easy to say, but living them requires growth. At first, our understanding of God's will may be incomplete. We may confuse the Father's will with our own desires, fears, religious traditions, cultural assumptions, or the expectations of other people. One of the supplementary messages considered in preparing this book warns precisely about this danger. It observes that people may sincerely believe they are carrying out the Father's will while acting according to ideas inherited from culture, tradition, and belief. The message therefore describes the understanding of God's will as something that itself requires cultivation.¹²

This means that seeking the Father's will must involve an ever-deepening understanding of the Father himself. The more accurately we understand divine love, truth, beauty, goodness, mercy, and wisdom, the more accurately we can recognize what alignment with God might mean in an actual human situation. The Father's will cannot logically lead us toward hatred while we are simultaneously being taught that God is love. It cannot lead us toward falsehood while drawing us toward truth, nor can genuine spiritual progress make us increasingly cruel while supposedly bringing us closer to divine goodness. As our understanding of God matures, our understanding of his will must mature with it, and as our choices become more consistently aligned with that will, our character can increasingly reflect the character of the Father.¹³

Here the perfection mandate becomes even more remarkable, because the Father does not merely stand at the end of an unimaginably long journey and command his children to find their own way to him. According to *The Urantia Book*, the Universal Father gives something of himself to indwell the human mind: the Thought Adjuster. The God who commands his children to become perfect also provides an inner divine presence to guide them toward that destiny. The destination and the Guide have the same source. God calls the creature toward himself while his presence within continually seeks to spiritualize thought, elevate choices, reveal higher meanings, and lead the individual toward the person he or she is capable of becoming.¹⁴

This divine presence does not eliminate human freedom. The Thought Adjuster does not compel a person to become spiritual, and the Father does not achieve perfection on our behalf while we remain passive. The relationship is cooperative. Divine guidance and human choice meet within the circumstances of daily life, and it is through this partnership that the evolving human soul develops. This helps explain why free will is so central to the perfection mandate. If God simply imposed his will upon the creature, the resulting behavior might be obedient, but it would not represent the freely chosen character of a child learning to become like the Father. Love must be chosen, goodness must become personally meaningful, and truth must be embraced rather than merely imposed.¹⁵

For this reason, becoming Godlike occurs largely through decisions. Spiritual development may sound mysterious when discussed abstractly, but in practice it repeatedly confronts us in ordinary situations. We decide whether to tell the truth when dishonesty would be easier, whether to forgive or preserve resentment, whether to help when there is nothing personally to gain, whether to control an angry response, whether to admit that we were wrong, and whether to treat another person according to what that person has done to us or according to the kind of person we ourselves are trying to become. We choose between fear and faith, selfishness and service, pride and humility, indifference and compassion. Most of these decisions do not appear dramatic, yet character is constructed through them.

A supplementary message entitled “Augment the Quality of Your Decisions” describes the evolving soul as developing through precisely this relationship between human choice and divine leading. It presents truth, beauty, and goodness as values recognized by the human mind and then acted upon in cooperation with the divine presence. The experiences, meanings, and values resulting from this human-divine partnership become part of the developing soul. This gives extraordinary significance to seemingly ordinary decisions. Perfection is not achieved through one enormous heroic act. It is progressively constructed through countless choices in which the individual becomes increasingly capable of choosing what is true, beautiful, good, loving, and consistent with the Father’s will.¹⁶

One of the supplementary messages offers a particularly useful image for understanding this relationship between divine direction and human freedom. It asks us to imagine a river flowing toward the sea. The sea represents perfection, the river represents evolution, and the current represents the will of God. The individual possesses freedom within the river and may explore its bends, move at different speeds, or even struggle against the current. Yet the river itself continues toward the sea. The image is helpful because the Father's will does not eliminate freedom; it gives freedom a direction in which it can reach its highest fulfillment. When our choices increasingly align with truth, beauty, goodness, love, mercy, and service, we begin moving more freely with the current. Life does not necessarily become easy, and obstacles do not disappear, but less of our spiritual energy is spent moving away from the very destination our deepest nature was created to seek.¹⁷

Understanding perfection as evolutionary also changes the way we interpret mistakes. If perfection develops through experience, then mistakes cannot automatically mean spiritual defeat. They may become instruction. A message entitled "Great Opportunities" explains that a person who sincerely decides to do the Father's will may still make mistakes because human beings possess only a partial view of reality and their perfection is evolutionary. The important response is to use mistakes and disappointments as opportunities to learn and advance. This does not excuse wrongdoing or eliminate personal responsibility. Growth requires that we recognize our mistakes honestly. But recognition does not require despair.¹⁸

The image of a child learning to walk illustrates this well. A child falls repeatedly, yet no loving parent interprets every fall as proof that the child has failed at learning to walk. The child rises, tries again, develops balance, strengthens the necessary muscles, and gradually learns to move with confidence. One of the messages collected for this book uses this same comparison to describe spiritual development. It encourages the struggling individual to recognize that growth occurs "step by tiny step" and concludes that there is no reason to become consumed by stress because "practice brings perfection." There is therefore a profound difference between seeking perfection and

practicing perfectionism. The first calls us forward; the second may make us afraid to move because we fear every possible failure.¹⁹

There will inevitably be times when we wonder whether we are progressing at all. Some days we may feel close to God. Our purpose seems clear, and patience, love, hope, and confidence come more naturally. Other days are different. We become distracted, old reactions return, worldly concerns seem more immediate than spiritual destiny, and we become impatient with ourselves and others. A message simply entitled “Days” recognizes this fluctuation. It describes times when everything appears spiritually ordered and meaningful, followed by days when ordinary responsibilities seem insufficient and a person may even forget why life has purpose.²⁰

Such fluctuations remind us that spiritual progress cannot always be measured by the emotional condition of a particular day. There will be periods when the inner flame burns brightly and others when only a few embers seem to remain. The important question is not merely how spiritually successful we felt today, but what direction we continued to choose. When we recognized that we were wrong, did we attempt to correct ourselves? When we failed to love, did we learn something about love? When resentment entered the mind, did we feed it indefinitely or eventually release it? When fear appeared, did we allow it to determine everything, or did we reach again toward faith? When we fell, did we remain where we had fallen, or did we rise and continue?

Mortal life provides innumerable opportunities for precisely this kind of development. We may imagine that spiritual progress would be easier under ideal circumstances, and perhaps it would be, but easier does not necessarily mean more valuable. Our present world confronts us with uncertainty, injustice, disappointment, competing desires, difficult personalities, limited knowledge, physical needs, family responsibilities, work, loss, failure, and change. Each circumstance asks, in one form or another, what we will do with the reality placed before us. Can we create goodness where goodness is lacking? Can we bring understanding where confusion exists? Can we show mercy when retaliation would be easier? Can we preserve hope in discouragement? Can we love someone who has not made loving them easy? Can we perform honest work when nobody praises us and choose what is right when nobody sees?

These experiences should not be regarded merely as interruptions to spiritual life. They are among the principal materials from which spiritual life is constructed. “Where You Stand,” another of the messages used in preparing this book, emphasizes that apparently routine responsibilities provide the experiences and lessons necessary for spiritual development. It specifically presents family responsibilities and ordinary earthly experience as meaningful parts of the preparation for the continuing ascension. The road toward perfection is therefore not hidden somewhere beyond our present existence. It has already begun beneath our feet.²¹

For Christians, and particularly within the teachings of *The Urantia Book*, the life of Jesus provides the supreme human demonstration of what wholehearted dedication to the Father can look like. His life should not discourage us because we cannot reproduce it perfectly. It should reveal direction. Jesus lived with an extraordinary consciousness of the Father’s presence. His religion was not merely a collection of theological propositions about God but a living relationship with God. He trusted the Father, sought the Father’s will, loved people, served them, forgave them, and remained spiritually centered through misunderstanding, opposition, disappointment, suffering, and eventually death. His perfection was not demonstrated by escaping human life but through the way he lived human life. The command to become perfect therefore does not require us to escape our humanity; it calls us progressively to spiritualize it.²²

This understanding also means that no one needs to wait for another world before beginning. We do not need to wait until we understand every spiritual teaching, until our circumstances improve, or until we become some imagined better version of ourselves. Our present relationships, responsibilities, work, disappointments, successes, mistakes, and decisions already provide the setting in which growth occurs. The person who irritates us may unknowingly provide an opportunity to develop patience. A responsibility that feels ordinary may be developing faithfulness. A mistake we deeply regret may eventually teach humility. Someone who needs assistance may give us an opportunity to discover the meaning of service. An injustice that troubles us may awaken courage. A quiet moment in which we turn

inward toward God may change the direction of a decision whose consequences we cannot yet imagine.

The command to “be perfect” should therefore not be understood as a threat hanging over imperfect humanity. It is an invitation, and within that invitation is an astonishing statement about what the Father knows his children can eventually become. We have been created unfinished because we were created with the capacity to grow. We begin as evolutionary creatures and are invited into an adventure whose ultimate destination reaches to the presence of the Universal Father. We will not reach that destination today, but we can turn toward it today. We can choose the Father’s will more sincerely today. We can become a little more truthful, patient, forgiving, courageous, merciful, and loving. We can listen more carefully for divine leading and make the next decision more consistent with the person we hope eventually to become.

Then we can make another decision, and another. Across mortal life and beyond it, through continuing experience, education, spiritual advancement, and the free consecration of the creature’s will, the ancient invitation remains before us. The destination is perfection, the journey is evolutionary, the Father has not left us without guidance, and the next step remains ours.

Chapter 2 — What Does Perfect Mean?

Before we can seriously respond to the command to become perfect, we must understand what the word *perfect* means. Much of the difficulty surrounding the Father's mandate comes from the meanings we bring to that word before we ever examine it spiritually. In ordinary conversation, perfection often means having no flaws, making no mistakes, lacking nothing, and performing without failure. A perfect score contains no wrong answers. A perfect performance contains no visible errors. A perfect object is imagined to be without defect. If we carry that same definition directly into spiritual life, the command to become perfect can quickly become impossible, discouraging, and even frightening.

Yet human beings are not created as finished creatures. We begin life with enormous potentials that have not yet been realized. We must learn almost everything through experience. We learn to walk by attempting to walk, to speak by attempting to communicate, to make wise decisions by first possessing only limited wisdom, and to understand other people by living among them. Spiritual growth follows the same evolutionary principle. We begin with capacities, possibilities, and divine assistance, but not with completed character. If perfection required us to possess at the beginning what can only be acquired through experience, then the very structure of evolutionary existence would contradict the command. Instead, the Father's mandate must be understood as a call toward the fullest realization of what a finite creature can become.

This is why it is important to distinguish divine perfection from creature perfection. The Universal Father does not become perfect. God is perfect. His perfection is inherent, eternal, and absolute. The perfection of an evolutionary creature is different because it is acquired through growth. We begin incomplete and become increasingly mature through experience, choice, struggle, discovery, relationship, service,

and spiritual cooperation. The perfection of the creature is therefore not an imitation of God's infinity. It is the fulfillment of the creature's own divinely intended potential.²³

A child can be perfectly healthy without possessing the body, knowledge, or judgment of an adult. The child is not defective merely because development remains ahead. In the same way, a sincere human being can possess a kind of spiritual rightness appropriate to his or her present stage without having attained the wisdom of the ages. There is a difference between being unfinished and being wrongly directed. This distinction is central to understanding evolutionary perfection. We may be incomplete while still moving faithfully toward completion. We may possess weaknesses while sincerely choosing their eventual transformation. We may lack wisdom while genuinely seeking truth. We may fail in execution while remaining loyal to the higher purpose we have chosen.

One of the most useful ideas for understanding this is what might be called perfection of purpose. A person may not yet possess perfection of attainment, but the direction of the will can already be devoted to the ultimate goal. The traveler has not reached the destination, yet the traveler has chosen it. In spiritual terms, this means that the human being can sincerely desire the Father's will before perfectly understanding it and can sincerely choose Godlikeness long before possessing mature Godlike character. The purpose can become increasingly pure while the achievement remains incomplete.²⁴

This is not a minor distinction. It means that spiritual perfection begins in the orientation of the personality. Two people may possess similar weaknesses while moving in very different spiritual directions. One may defend resentment, dishonesty, selfishness, or cruelty as acceptable and refuse every invitation to grow. The other may struggle with some of the same tendencies while sincerely recognizing them, seeking help, attempting to overcome them, and repeatedly choosing something better. Outwardly, both may still appear imperfect. Spiritually, however, their relationship to imperfection is very different. One has made peace with stagnation; the other has entered the process of transformation.

This helps explain why intention matters, although intention alone is not enough. A sincere desire for goodness must gradually become

goodness expressed through decisions and behavior. A person cannot indefinitely claim love while consistently choosing hatred, nor can one claim devotion to truth while knowingly cultivating falsehood. But spiritual maturity does not require that intention and achievement become identical overnight. The sincere intention creates the direction in which experience, discipline, correction, and divine guidance can increasingly shape conduct.

The supplementary messages considered in preparing this book repeatedly describe growth in this progressive way. “Practice Brings Perfection” presents spiritual development as learning “step by tiny step.” It acknowledges failures, impatience, discouragement, and the need for self-discipline while emphasizing that progress occurs through practice rather than through instant transformation. This is a useful corrective to the idea that spiritual sincerity should immediately eliminate every weakness. A person may sincerely choose the path and still require repeated practice before new habits of thought and action become stable.²⁵

We should therefore distinguish perfection from perfectionism. The two may sound similar, but spiritually they can lead in opposite directions. Perfection draws the individual toward the Father. Perfectionism often traps the individual in excessive self-observation. Perfection encourages growth. Perfectionism may create fear of failure. Perfection directs attention toward becoming increasingly truthful, loving, merciful, courageous, and useful. Perfectionism can become preoccupied with appearing faultless. Perfection allows mistakes to become teachers. Perfectionism may interpret every mistake as personal defeat.

The difference becomes clearer when we consider how a loving parent responds to a growing child. A good parent does not demand from a six-year-old the strength, knowledge, emotional maturity, and judgment of a forty-year-old. The parent expects growth appropriate to the child’s stage and encourages development toward greater maturity. A loving parent can be pleased with sincere progress even while knowing that much development remains. If human parental love can understand such distinctions, divine love surely does not confuse evolutionary immaturity with rebellion against growth.

This understanding also allows us to approach the idea of being perfect “in our day and time.” One of the supplementary teachings uses that expression to describe a standard of spiritual maturity appropriate to the evolutionary circumstances in which a person actually lives. It argues that absolute perfection is not attainable on an evolutionary world and presents Jesus as the supreme example of a human life fully attuned to divine leading within the possibilities of mortal existence. Whether we use that exact expression frequently or not, the underlying concept is valuable. We are responsible for what we can genuinely choose and become from where we presently stand. We are not asked to possess experiences we have not yet lived or understanding we have not yet acquired.²⁶

This does not lower the goal. The ultimate destination remains magnificent. Rather, it makes the path intelligible. A staircase is not diminished because it must be climbed one step at a time. The top remains the top. But attempting to leap from the first step to the last would not demonstrate greater commitment; it would demonstrate a misunderstanding of how ascent occurs. Spiritual development also has sequence. Experience builds upon experience. Wisdom grows as meanings deepen. Character becomes increasingly stable as higher choices are repeatedly made. The soul develops through the accumulated spiritual value of lived decisions.

This also helps us distinguish perfection from completeness. The two words can easily be treated as synonyms, but they do not always describe the same idea. Something may be perfect according to its nature or function while still capable of acquiring further experience. One supplementary message concerning Thought Adjusters makes this distinction explicitly, describing them as perfect in their divine nature while capable of becoming more complete through experiential participation with ascending creatures. We should use this distinction carefully, especially because our primary theological framework remains *The Urantia Book*, but it offers a useful conceptual insight: perfection need not always mean that nothing more can ever be experienced, learned, expressed, or completed.²⁷

For human beings, this distinction is even more obvious. A person can make the best possible decision available within present understanding and still later acquire greater wisdom. A loving act does

not become meaningless because future love may become deeper. A courageous decision does not become imperfect simply because future courage may be stronger. Growth does not necessarily invalidate earlier stages of genuine achievement. Instead, each sincere attainment may become the foundation for a larger one.

The same principle can be applied to our understanding of God. Early in spiritual life, a person may possess a simple concept of the Father. That concept may contain genuine truth while remaining incomplete. Later experience may expand it. Suffering may deepen it. Parenthood may enrich it. Forgiveness may reveal something previously unseen. Service may transform theology into experience. Stillness may make the idea of divine presence more personal. The earlier understanding was not necessarily worthless because it was incomplete. It may have represented the highest truth the person was then capable of receiving.

This is one reason humility is indispensable on the road toward perfection. As we grow, we repeatedly discover that our earlier understanding was partial. We learn that some judgments were premature, some assumptions were inherited rather than examined, and some convictions contained more of ourselves than of God. Genuine spiritual maturity therefore produces neither arrogance nor spiritual superiority. The closer we move toward truth, the more clearly we perceive how much remains beyond us.

At the same time, humility should not be confused with self-devaluation. The perfection mandate itself implies enormous confidence in the potential of the human personality. The Father would not call his children toward an impossible destiny while providing no means of progress. To acknowledge our immaturity is not to deny our value. In fact, the two truths belong together: we are profoundly unfinished, and we possess an extraordinary destiny.

This balance is essential because some people react to their imperfections by condemning themselves. They believe spiritual seriousness requires constant dissatisfaction with who they are. Yet self-condemnation does not necessarily produce growth. It can consume the very energy needed for change. "Practice Brings Perfection" counsels the struggling individual not to become overwhelmed by discouragement and instead to continue practicing, living in the present,

and drawing near to the divine presence within. The message does not dismiss the need for discipline; it places discipline within a larger atmosphere of patience and hope.²⁸

Forgiveness becomes important here, including forgiveness of oneself. Another supplementary message, “Inner Freedom,” describes forgiveness as essential to releasing old anger, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation. It encourages the individual to acknowledge past reactions that were less than ideal without remaining permanently imprisoned by them. If we are truly evolutionary beings, then our past necessarily contains earlier versions of ourselves who possessed less wisdom than we may possess today. We should learn from those earlier choices, make amends where possible, and refuse to turn memory into a permanent barrier against further growth.²⁹

Perfection therefore involves an honest relationship with imperfection. We neither deny our shortcomings nor worship them. We neither excuse them indefinitely nor use them as weapons against ourselves. We bring them into awareness, understand them as clearly as possible, and place them within the continuing work of transformation. The question becomes not whether we have weaknesses, because every evolutionary mortal has them, but what we are doing with those weaknesses.

Some weaknesses will require persistent effort. Patterns of impatience, resentment, pride, fear, jealousy, selfishness, or uncontrolled desire may not disappear simply because we have recognized them. “The Road to Perfection” describes this process in terms of self-discipline, conscious awareness, forgiveness, and repeated return to the inner divine presence. It presents progress as occurring gradually, “step by tiny step.” The road is therefore neither passive nor punitive. It requires participation, but participation sustained by the understanding that transformation is progressive.³⁰

This gives us a more practical definition of perfection. At our present stage, perfection is not the absence of every limitation. It is increasingly wholehearted cooperation with the divine purpose appropriate to our level of development. It is sincerity of direction joined with continuing growth in character. It is becoming increasingly responsive to truth, beauty, goodness, love, mercy, wisdom, and service.

It is allowing the decisions of today to prepare us for greater decisions tomorrow.

A person living in this way may still experience failure. There may still be days of confusion, weakness, frustration, and doubt. But these experiences need not contradict the journey. They become part of the material through which maturity develops. “Great Opportunities” describes mortal beings as possessing evolutionary perfection and therefore being prone to mistakes because their view of reality is partial. Yet those who sincerely desire to become better can use mistakes and disappointments as opportunities for advancement. This understanding allows responsibility and hope to coexist.³¹

There is another important consequence. If perfection is evolutionary, then comparing ourselves constantly with other people becomes spiritually unhelpful. We do not know another person’s full history, capacities, inner struggles, opportunities, wounds, understanding, or relationship with God. Two individuals may stand in very different places on the same ascending road. The proper comparison is not primarily between one personality and another, but between what we are choosing now and the higher possibility that divine guidance presents to us.

This does not mean we cannot learn from exemplary people. On the contrary, noble lives can reveal possibilities we had not imagined. Jesus remains the supreme example because his life shows the human personality in extraordinary harmony with the Father’s will. Yet even here, imitation must be understood correctly. We are not called to reproduce the external circumstances of Jesus’ life or copy every historical action. We are called to discover the same central orientation: trust in the Father, devotion to his will, love for his children, courage in difficulty, mercy toward weakness, truthfulness, service, and spiritual freedom.

The goal is therefore deeply personal. God is not producing identical personalities. Perfection does not erase individuality. The Father’s universe is not moving toward sameness but toward increasingly harmonious diversity. As the individual becomes more Godlike, personality becomes more fully itself, not less. The distortion produced by fear, selfishness, resentment, dishonesty, and spiritual

confusion gradually gives way to a freer and more authentic expression of the unique person God intended.

This may be one of the most beautiful aspects of the perfection mandate. God does not ask us to become someone else. He asks us to become the highest realization of who we were created to be. The journey is not toward a borrowed identity but toward the fulfillment of divine potential within personality. We become more truly ourselves as we become more aligned with the Father.

When understood in this way, the command to be perfect loses much of its threatening character. It remains demanding because genuine growth always asks something of us. It requires honesty, discipline, courage, patience, faith, forgiveness, service, and repeated decisions of the will. But it is not a demand for instant faultlessness. It is the invitation to participate consciously in our own eternal development.

Perfection is the destination, but progressive Godlikeness is the present work. We do not have to finish the journey today. We do have to decide whether we are willing to continue it. We do not have to possess all wisdom, but we can become more teachable. We do not have to love perfectly, but we can choose to love more faithfully. We do not have to eliminate every weakness immediately, but we can stop protecting those weaknesses from transformation. We do not have to see the entire road ahead. We need only remain willing to take the next real step.

Once perfection is understood in this evolutionary sense, the Father's mandate becomes not only possible but deeply personal. The command no longer asks, "Why are you not already what eternity will eventually make possible?" Instead, it confronts us with a more immediate question: "What are you choosing to become?"

The answer to that question leads directly to the next part of our journey, because becoming Godlike depends above all upon learning to understand, choose, and increasingly live the will of the Father.

Chapter 3 — The Will of the Father

If the command to become perfect gives us the destination of the spiritual journey, the will of the Father gives us its direction. We cannot seriously speak about becoming like God without eventually asking what God desires for us and how that desire can become increasingly reflected in the choices we make. This is why the Father's will occupies such a central place in the spiritual life. Perfection is not something we construct according to our own definition and then present to God as an accomplishment. It develops as the human will increasingly learns to recognize, choose, and cooperate with what is divine.³²

The phrase "the will of God" is familiar enough that its significance can easily be overlooked. It is spoken in prayers, sermons, moments of uncertainty, and times of suffering. People ask whether an event was God's will, whether a particular decision is God's will, or whether they are living according to God's will. Yet the phrase can mean very different things depending upon our concept of God. If we imagine God primarily as a distant ruler issuing commands, then doing his will may sound like obedience to an external authority. If we understand God as the loving Universal Father whose spirit indwells his children, the meaning becomes far more personal. The Father's will is no longer merely an order coming from outside us. It becomes the divine direction toward which the highest possibilities within us are being drawn.

This does not mean that everything we desire is secretly the Father's will. Nor does it mean that every strong feeling, intuition, coincidence, or personal conviction should automatically be attributed to divine guidance. Human beings are capable of confusing desire with revelation and certainty with truth. History provides abundant examples of people who believed God supported their ambitions, prejudices, conflicts, or judgments. Sincerity by itself does not guarantee accuracy. A person can be sincerely mistaken.

One of the supplementary messages used in preparing this book addresses this danger directly. “Where You Stand” describes consecration of the human will to the Father’s will as a fundamental requirement of spiritual advancement, but it immediately adds that our understanding of the Father’s will must mature. It observes that spiritually immature individuals may interpret God’s will through culture, traditions, and inherited beliefs, sometimes with destructive consequences. The message therefore describes a period of cultivation in which the individual develops a progressively better ideal of what the Father’s will actually is.³³

This is an important safeguard. Saying “God wills this” does not make it so. If our concept of God is distorted, our concept of his will may also be distorted. The search for the Father’s will must therefore begin with the search for the Father. We must increasingly understand his character if we hope to recognize what is consistent with him. Truth, beauty, goodness, love, mercy, patience, wisdom, and service become more than admirable spiritual words; they become standards by which our interpretations can be examined.

The question “What does God want me to do?” is therefore sometimes preceded by a deeper question: “What is God like?” The more clearly we understand the Father, the less likely we are to attribute to him motives that arise from fear, pride, resentment, selfishness, or prejudice. A loving Father does not become an excuse for hatred. The source of truth cannot require deliberate falsehood merely because falsehood is convenient. The God of mercy cannot be invoked to justify cruelty simply because cruelty satisfies our anger. Our understanding will never be perfect during mortal life, but it can become more mature, more coherent, and increasingly consistent with the divine values we are learning to recognize.

This also means that the Father’s will should not be reduced to a secret plan governing every minor detail of our earthly existence. We sometimes approach God as though there were only one divinely acceptable choice concerning every job, residence, friendship, purchase, schedule, or ordinary decision, and that our task were to discover the hidden answer before making a move. Such an approach can produce spiritual anxiety rather than spiritual freedom. It can make people afraid

to exercise the very judgment, creativity, and responsibility that evolutionary life is designed to develop.

There are certainly decisions of great consequence, and seeking divine guidance in them is wise. But the deeper purpose of spiritual growth is not to transform the Father into a substitute for human judgment. It is to develop the kind of person whose judgment becomes increasingly trustworthy because character is increasingly aligned with divine values. A mature child does not honor a wise parent by refusing ever to think independently. The parent teaches the child principles, values, discernment, and responsibility so that eventually the child can make good decisions even when no explicit instruction has been given. Spiritual maturity likewise involves the development of a personality increasingly capable of choosing wisely.

This is where consecration of the will must be properly understood. To consecrate our will to the Father does not mean that our will disappears. It means that we freely decide what our will is ultimately for. Human freedom reaches one of its highest expressions when a person knowingly chooses to use that freedom in harmony with the divine purpose. “Your will be done” is therefore not the language of spiritual defeat. It can become the language of profound freedom because the individual is choosing the direction in which his or her personality will develop.³⁴

Such consecration may begin with a single sincere decision, but living that decision requires repeated choices. We may decide today that we want the Father’s will and tomorrow discover how strongly we still prefer our own way in a particular situation. We may sincerely desire to become loving until we encounter someone difficult to love. We may value forgiveness until we are genuinely injured. We may believe in honesty until truth threatens our reputation or advantage. We may admire humility until admitting an error becomes personally costly. It is in these moments that an abstract commitment becomes experiential.

This is why daily life is indispensable to spiritual development. Without real circumstances, the values we profess would remain largely theoretical. We might imagine ourselves patient if nothing ever tested our patience, courageous if nothing frightened us, forgiving if no one injured us, and generous if nothing required sacrifice. Experience reveals the distance between the ideals we admire and the character we

actually possess. That revelation may be uncomfortable, but it is also useful. We cannot consciously transform what we refuse to see.

The Father's will does not condemn us merely because this distance exists. Evolutionary creatures are expected to grow. The important question is what we do when experience reveals where growth is needed. Do we defend the lower reaction simply because it is ours, or do we become willing to exchange it for something higher? Do we justify resentment, or do we begin the difficult work of forgiveness? Do we protect pride, or do we allow truth to correct us? Each such moment contains a small but meaningful opportunity to reconsecrate the will.

"A Sense of Duty," one of the supplementary Thought Adjuster messages, describes the fundamental duty of the creature as doing the Father's will and presents the indwelling Adjuster as helping translate that divine will into something the mortal mind can progressively understand. The message encourages the individual to contemplate the highest conception of God available—truth, beauty, goodness, and the love of the best imaginable parent—and then consider what changes would make the individual increasingly reflective of that divine ideal. This approach is useful because it moves the Father's will away from speculation and toward transformation. Instead of asking only what God wants to happen around us, we begin asking what God is seeking to develop within us.³⁵

That change of emphasis can alter the way we approach difficult circumstances. When something does not go according to our plans, our first question may be why God allowed it or whether the event itself was his will. Sometimes no satisfying answer is available. The spiritual question that remains accessible, however, is what we can choose within the reality that now exists. Even when we cannot determine why something happened, we can still ask how truth, goodness, courage, patience, mercy, wisdom, or love might be expressed in our response.

This does not require us to call evil good or pretend that suffering is desirable. Injustice should not be renamed divine will merely because it occurred. Human beings possess genuine freedom, and the consequences of selfishness, ignorance, error, and wrongdoing are real. The Father's will can be sought in our response to such realities without

attributing every painful circumstance directly to God. We can oppose injustice while refusing hatred, confront falsehood without abandoning love, endure disappointment without surrendering hope, and attempt to create something good from circumstances that were not themselves good.

“Great Opportunities” develops this idea by describing the person consecrated to the Father’s will as someone whose decisions increasingly become expressions of goodness. It speaks of creating good from evil, bringing light into darkness, confronting injustice through mercy, and overcoming hatred through love. This is a demanding vision of divine cooperation. The individual is not merely waiting for God to repair the world. The person becomes an active participant in bringing reality closer to the values of the Father.³⁶

The will of God therefore has a creative dimension. When we choose love where hatred would have been possible, something exists that would not otherwise have existed. When we forgive, serve, encourage, teach, comfort, create beauty, defend dignity, speak truth, or relieve suffering, we contribute something to the moral and spiritual quality of the world. These acts may appear small compared with the enormous problems of human civilization, but their spiritual significance cannot be measured only by their public visibility.

A quiet act of mercy may never be recorded by history and still alter the life of another person. A parent who patiently guides a child may contribute more to the future than either of them can presently understand. A worker who performs an ordinary task with honesty and concern for others may express the Father’s character without ever describing the act as spiritual. A person who chooses not to return an insult may interrupt a chain of resentment that otherwise would have continued. The Father’s will can become visible through ordinary goodness.

This is one reason the pursuit of perfection cannot be separated from service. If becoming like God meant only achieving an elevated internal state, spiritual growth could become profoundly self-centered. We might spend our lives measuring our progress while ignoring the people around us. Yet divine goodness naturally moves outward. Love seeks the good of another. Truth seeks expression. Mercy responds to need. Wisdom becomes useful through application. As character

becomes increasingly Godlike, service becomes less an imposed duty and more a natural expression of what the person is becoming.

The same principle applies to work. “The Benefits of Work” describes ordinary labor as a setting in which discipline, responsibility, perseverance, ethics, and service can develop. It argues that even humble work can contribute to civilization and that performing what is before us with sincere intention can become part of the continuing effort to manifest increasing perfection. The Father’s will therefore need not always appear as an extraordinary religious assignment. Very often it may be expressed through the quality with which we perform the responsibility already in front of us.³⁷

This can free us from the assumption that a spiritually significant life must be publicly remarkable. Some people will have highly visible responsibilities, while others will live almost entirely outside public attention. Spiritual value is not determined by fame. A life may be largely unknown to the world and still contain extraordinary loyalty, courage, sacrifice, tenderness, and faith. The Father sees the choices from which character is formed, including those that no human audience ever notices.

Jesus provides the highest example of this orientation. His life was governed by a sustained desire to know and do the Father’s will, yet this did not make him passive or indecisive. He displayed initiative, courage, creativity, judgment, and an extraordinary freedom of personality. His devotion to the Father did not erase his humanity; it brought his humanity into increasingly complete harmony with his spiritual purpose. He demonstrated that obedience to God and genuine personal freedom are not enemies when obedience is freely chosen through love.

This is important because fear can produce outward obedience without inward transformation. A person may obey because punishment is feared, authority is intimidating, or reward is desired. Such motivations may influence behavior, but the Father’s purpose reaches deeper. The ideal is that we eventually choose goodness because we have come to love goodness, truth because we value truth, mercy because mercy has become part of our character, and the Father’s will because we increasingly trust and love the Father.

The relationship is therefore personal before it is merely legal. A child who loves and trusts a wise parent gradually begins to understand

why certain values matter. Eventually, the child may choose those values even when the parent is not visibly present. Something similar occurs spiritually as the relationship with God matures. We move from asking only, “What am I permitted to do?” toward asking, “What is the most loving, truthful, beautiful, and good thing I can choose here?” Moral rules remain useful, but character increasingly participates in the decision.³⁸

The Thought Adjuster becomes central to this process because the search for the Father’s will is not conducted without divine assistance. The supplementary messages repeatedly emphasize stillness, inward listening, sincerity, and cooperation with the divine presence. “The Only True and Pure Constant in Your Life” stresses the importance of moving beyond merely knowing intellectually that the Adjuster exists toward developing a consciously meaningful relationship with the divine presence within. Whatever language we use to describe the experience, the underlying principle is important: spiritual growth becomes more personal when God is not regarded merely as an idea about the universe but as a living presence with whom the individual seeks relationship.³⁹

Yet discernment remains necessary. Inner impressions must not automatically be labeled divine. Human thought, emotion, memory, desire, imagination, fear, and spiritual influence all meet within the inner life. The safest evidence of genuine spiritual progress is not an impressive claim about receiving guidance but the quality of character that develops from the relationship. Are we becoming more loving? More truthful? More patient? More merciful? More courageous? More willing to serve? More respectful of the dignity and freedom of others? A spiritual experience that consistently produces pride, hostility, superiority, or disregard for others deserves serious examination regardless of how certain the individual feels about its origin.⁴⁰

“Augment the Quality of Your Decisions” similarly connects alignment with divine leading to recognizable fruits such as love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, and self-control. It presents spiritual development as conscious participation in a partnership in which human choice increasingly responds to divine leading rather than to the automatic reactions of the lower nature. The Father’s will thus becomes

visible not primarily through extraordinary claims but through the gradual transformation of ordinary character.⁴¹

There will still be uncertainty. We will sometimes make a decision sincerely and later discover that another choice might have been wiser. This is unavoidable for finite beings. The purpose of spiritual guidance is not to make us omniscient before we have earned wisdom through experience. We will learn partly because some decisions reveal consequences we did not anticipate. What matters is that we remain teachable. A mistake honestly examined can contribute to wisdom; a mistake defended indefinitely becomes a barrier to it.

This gives humility another important role in doing the Father's will. We should be able to say, "I believe this is right," without always needing to say, "God told me this, therefore I cannot be wrong." The first leaves room for growth. The second can close the door to correction. The more serious our desire to do God's will becomes, the more willing we should be to examine whether our own assumptions are interfering with it.

Over time, this process can produce a remarkable change. At first, doing the Father's will may feel like repeatedly choosing against strong lower impulses. Later, choices that once required great effort may become more natural because character itself has changed. Forgiveness may come more readily. Service may become more spontaneous. Truthfulness may cease to feel costly because dishonesty has become increasingly foreign to the person we have become. What began as discipline gradually becomes disposition.

This is how repeated decisions participate in the formation of character. We become, in part, what we repeatedly choose. Each decision does not transform us completely, but decisions accumulate. Patterns become habits, habits influence character, and character shapes future decisions. When this entire process is increasingly opened to divine guidance, the human personality gradually becomes more capable of expressing the values it once only admired.

Consecrating the will to the Father is therefore not a single sentence spoken once and then completed. There may indeed be a decisive moment when a person wholeheartedly chooses God's way, but that supreme orientation must then be expressed through thousands of

smaller choices. Every day gives the original decision another opportunity to become real.

The Father does not ask us to know everything before we begin. He asks for willingness. We can offer the understanding we presently possess, remain open to greater truth, and choose the highest value we can sincerely recognize. Tomorrow we may understand more. If we do, tomorrow's responsibility will be greater because greater light makes a higher choice possible. Growth continues in this way, not through divine coercion but through an increasingly intimate cooperation between the human will and the divine presence.

To do the Father's will, then, is not to surrender the adventure of personality. It is to enter that adventure more fully. It is to use freedom for the purpose for which freedom reaches its greatest meaning: the voluntary discovery of God and the progressive transformation of the creature into his likeness. The Father supplies the destination, the divine presence, the truth that calls us upward, and the love that sustains the journey. The human contribution remains indispensable: we must choose.

And because the Father has not left us alone in making that choice, the next question becomes unavoidable. Who is this divine presence within us that guides without compelling, teaches without overpowering, and works patiently through the experiences of our lives? To understand the road toward perfection more deeply, we must now turn to one of the most extraordinary teachings at the center of *The Urantia Book*: the Thought Adjuster, the presence of God within the human mind.

Chapter 4 — God Within Us

The command to become perfect takes on an entirely different meaning when we understand that the Father who gives the command has not remained distant from the creature expected to fulfill it. The spiritual journey is not the story of an imperfect human being attempting, through personal effort alone, to climb an impossible distance toward an unreachable God. According to *The Urantia Book*, the Universal Father has established a direct and intimate connection with his mortal children through the presence of the Thought Adjuster. A fragment of the Father indwells the human mind, quietly working within the very creature who has been called to seek God and eventually become like him.⁴²

This is one of the most extraordinary ideas in the entire perfection mandate. The Father does not merely tell us where to go. He provides an inner guide toward the destination. He does not simply command the evolutionary creature to discover divine values from a distance. He establishes within that creature a divine presence continually seeking to elevate thought, spiritualize meaning, encourage higher choices, and lead the personality toward an increasingly Godlike way of living. The command to become perfect and the gift of the Adjuster therefore belong together. The destiny comes from the Father, and so does the divine assistance that makes the journey possible.⁴³

Yet the presence of the Thought Adjuster does not suddenly make a human being perfect. If it did, the moment of divine indwelling would complete the entire ascension career. Human struggle would disappear, character would require no development, experience would lose much of its purpose, and moral choice would become unnecessary. Instead, the Adjuster works within an evolutionary process. The divine presence is perfect, but the human being being guided by that presence remains unfinished. The relationship therefore brings divine perfection into intimate association with evolutionary potential.

This helps us understand why spiritual growth is neither exclusively human nor exclusively divine. The Father does not force perfection upon us, and we cannot produce eternal spiritual development entirely by ourselves. The journey involves cooperation. The Adjuster provides divine leading; the human personality provides consent, choice, experience, and the willingness to respond. The divine presence may continually point toward higher values, but the human being must decide whether those values will be chosen and lived.⁴⁴

Free will is therefore not an obstacle that God must overcome. It is essential to the entire purpose. The Father desires children who freely learn to know him, love him, and become like him. If the divine presence simply controlled the human mind, outward behavior might be directed toward predetermined results, but genuine character would not develop through personal choice. The creature would be managed rather than educated. The Father's method is more patient and more profound. Divine guidance respects personality because love respects freedom.⁴⁵

This means that the Adjuster can be extraordinarily close while remaining remarkably unobtrusive. God within us does not ordinarily overwhelm consciousness or remove the uncertainty inherent in mortal life. We still have to think, discern, choose, learn, and sometimes discover through consequences that our judgment was incomplete. The presence of divine guidance does not convert human beings into infallible creatures. Rather, it creates the possibility that within our imperfect thinking there can continually arise an attraction toward something higher than our immediate impulses.⁴⁶

We may experience this attraction in many ways. There are moments when truth seems to demand recognition even though acknowledging it is inconvenient. There are occasions when mercy presents itself as the better response despite the desire for retaliation. We may become suddenly aware that an attitude we have defended is unworthy of the person we want to become. We may feel drawn toward service when selfishness would be easier, toward reconciliation when pride prefers distance, or toward courage when fear urges retreat. We should be cautious about labeling every inner impulse as direct divine communication, but we should also recognize that the spiritual life

includes this continuing encounter between lower possibilities and higher ones.⁴⁷

The Thought Adjuster's work is not primarily to make our earthly lives comfortable. The greater purpose is to prepare us for eternity. This distinction matters because people sometimes measure divine guidance according to whether circumstances turn out as they hoped. If a desired opportunity appears, they may conclude that God guided them correctly; if disappointment follows, they may wonder whether God abandoned them. But an eternal guide must evaluate experience according to a much larger standard than temporary comfort. An experience we would never voluntarily choose may nevertheless reveal something about our character, deepen compassion, expose misplaced priorities, or create opportunities for decisions of lasting spiritual value.⁴⁸

This does not mean that suffering should be romanticized or that every painful event should be attributed directly to God. Human beings suffer for many reasons, including natural conditions, accidents, ignorance, personal mistakes, and the harmful choices of others. The presence of the Adjuster does not require us to call tragedy good. What it means is that no circumstance automatically prevents spiritual growth. Even when something is genuinely wrong, the divine presence can continue working with the human personality within that reality, helping the individual determine what can now be made of it.

The difference is significant. God need not have caused a painful event in order to help us respond to it. The Father's presence can encourage courage in suffering, wisdom after failure, forgiveness after injury, patience in uncertainty, and renewed purpose after disappointment. Divine guidance can help transform what happens to us into material from which something spiritually valuable can emerge. In this sense, the Adjuster does not merely guide us around difficulties. The divine presence can guide us through them.

The relationship becomes especially meaningful when we remember that the Adjuster knows the destination more fully than we do. We usually see only a small portion of our lives. Even our understanding of ourselves is incomplete. We may strongly desire something that would contribute little to our eternal development while resisting an experience that eventually proves transformative. Our immediate

priorities and our eternal interests are not always identical. The divine presence within, however, is oriented toward the realization of our highest spiritual potential.

“A Sense of Duty,” one of the supplementary Thought Adjuster messages used in preparing this book, describes the Adjuster as progressively helping the mortal understand the Father’s will and the purpose of life. It encourages the individual to seek the highest conceivable image of God and then to consider what changes would make the person increasingly like that divine ideal. The process is described not as instantaneous revelation but as progressive guidance toward becoming the best the individual can become.⁴⁹

This progressive quality is important because we may sometimes expect spiritual guidance to arrive as complete answers. We want certainty about the future, unmistakable instructions, and immediate solutions to complicated problems. But the Adjuster’s greater work concerns the development of the person who makes the decision. Sometimes receiving an unquestionable answer would resolve the immediate problem while doing less to develop discernment, wisdom, faith, and responsibility. The Father is not merely solving situations; he is raising children capable of participating increasingly intelligently in universe life.

For this reason, the relationship with the divine presence cannot be reduced to asking for instructions. It is ultimately a relationship of transformation. The most important question may not always be, “What is God telling me to do?” but “What is my relationship with God helping me to become?” A person might make the correct external decision for selfish reasons, while another might make an imperfect decision through sincere but incomplete understanding and then grow profoundly from the experience. God sees more than the visible result. The spiritual value of choice includes motive, intention, understanding, and the character being formed through the process.

The supplementary message “The Only True and Pure Constant in Your Life” emphasizes the importance of developing a consciously meaningful relationship with the Thought Adjuster rather than allowing the Adjuster to remain merely an intellectual concept. It describes the divine presence as the enduring spiritual constant accompanying the individual through the ascension journey. While some of the specific

practices suggested in that message belong to that supplementary teaching rather than directly to *The Urantia Book*, its broader point is valuable: knowing that God is within us intellectually is different from allowing that truth to influence how we actually live.⁵⁰

If we genuinely believe that something of the Father is present within, then solitude changes. Prayer changes. Decision-making changes. The way we regard ourselves changes. Even the meaning of human dignity expands. The poorest and most socially insignificant person may carry within the mind the same extraordinary divine gift as someone celebrated by millions. Human value cannot therefore be measured adequately by wealth, education, fame, appearance, productivity, social influence, or earthly achievement. The possibility of divine indwelling gives every person a spiritual significance that outward circumstances may completely conceal.

This realization should also change the way we treat others. If we claim to honor the Father within ourselves while consistently degrading his children, something in our spirituality remains divided. The presence of God within the human personality does not make every human action good, but it gives us reason to look beyond behavior toward potential. A difficult person may still possess an eternal destiny. Someone spiritually immature today may become profoundly different through future experience. A person we have reduced to a single mistake may be known by God according to possibilities we cannot yet see.

This does not require abandoning judgment or boundaries. Love does not mean pretending harmful behavior is harmless. Jesus could love people while speaking truth, correcting error, and refusing manipulation. Recognizing divine potential in another person means that even necessary correction should avoid the desire to destroy the person's dignity. We can oppose behavior without concluding that the individual has no value. The Father's relationship with his children gives us a higher model for our relationships with one another.

The Thought Adjuster also helps us understand why the journey toward perfection is so personal. Spiritual growth cannot be mass-produced. Religious communities can teach, encourage, worship, serve, and preserve valuable traditions, but no institution can make the ultimate spiritual decisions for the individual. The most decisive choices

occur within personality. Another person can explain truth, but we must decide whether to embrace it. Someone can model forgiveness, but we must decide whether to forgive. A teacher can describe the Father, but we must decide whether to seek him.⁵¹

This inner dimension protects spiritual life from becoming merely external conformity. It is possible to appear religious without undergoing significant inner transformation. A person may know doctrines, attend services, participate in rituals, use spiritual vocabulary, and still protect resentment, pride, dishonesty, or selfishness from examination. External religion can support genuine spiritual growth, but it cannot substitute for the personal encounter between the human will and the divine presence.

The Father's work begins in the inner life because choices are born there before they become visible in action. A harsh word usually begins before it is spoken. Forgiveness begins before reconciliation becomes visible. Service begins as a willingness before it becomes an act. Dishonesty begins in the decision to protect something false. Courage begins when fear is recognized but is no longer permitted to determine the choice. The inner life is therefore not imaginary or secondary. It is one of the principal arenas in which character develops.

"Augment the Quality of Your Decisions" describes the developing soul as emerging within this relationship between human mind and divine leading. Truth, beauty, and goodness are recognized, and human choice responds to them. The message portrays the accumulated spiritual meanings and values arising from this partnership as contributing to the evolving soul that seeks Godlikeness. This gives us a useful way of understanding why ordinary choices possess eternal significance. What we repeatedly value and choose does more than affect circumstances; it participates in what we are becoming.⁵²

This process also explains why self-mastery matters. If every impulse were equally trustworthy, spiritual discernment would be unnecessary. But human nature contains competing desires. Some arise from legitimate material needs, some from habits and emotional reactions, some from fear or pride, and others from genuinely higher aspiration. Growth requires learning to distinguish among them. The aim is not to despise our humanity but to bring its many energies into increasingly harmonious relationship with spiritual purpose.⁵³

“The Road to Perfection” describes this process through self-discipline, awareness of thoughts and actions, forgiveness, and repeated return to the divine presence within. It specifically identifies tendencies such as anger, jealousy, resentment, impatience, and unforgiveness as areas in which greater mastery can gradually produce love, joy, compassion, and patience. The significance of self-mastery is therefore not that God prefers emotionally restrained people. Its purpose is to free the personality from being automatically governed by reactions that prevent higher values from being expressed.⁵⁴

The Adjuster does not accomplish this by suppressing personality. Divine guidance seeks the fullest spiritual expression of personality. The goal is not a human being who has become colorless, passive, or detached from life. Jesus certainly was not such a person. Spiritual maturity should increase our capacity to engage reality wisely and lovingly. Courage can become stronger, compassion deeper, creativity freer, humor healthier, relationships more genuine, and service more intelligent. Godlikeness does not diminish authentic personality; it increasingly frees personality from the distortions that prevent its highest expression.

There is also patience in this divine-human partnership. The Adjuster knows that evolutionary development takes time. We are often far less patient with ourselves. Once we recognize a weakness, we may want it gone immediately. When it returns, we become discouraged and wonder whether we have made any progress. Yet a deeply rooted pattern may require repeated decisions before a new response becomes established. Spiritual growth is not always dramatic enough to be noticed from one day to the next.

Consider a person struggling with impatience. At first, the reaction may occur automatically and remain unquestioned. Later, the person recognizes it only after causing harm. With greater awareness, recognition may occur during the reaction. Eventually there may be a brief moment before the reaction in which another choice becomes possible. After repeated practice, the person may begin responding differently more often than not. What once required intense self-control may eventually become a more natural patience. The transformation did not occur in one instant, but genuine character has changed.

This is why small victories should not be dismissed. The spiritual journey is made from such changes. A resentful thought released sooner than before, an apology offered more readily, a temptation recognized more clearly, a moment of compassion where judgment once dominated, or a decision to pause before speaking may appear insignificant. Yet each may represent a real increase in the capacity of the human personality to respond to higher leading.

The divine presence is patient because the Father is interested not merely in what we accomplish today but in what we are becoming eternally. Mortal life is the beginning of a much longer educational experience. “The Matter of Eternity” describes earthly existence as the foundation of an ascending career that continues through the morontia worlds, the local universe, and beyond as the creature progresses toward the goal of becoming perfect like the Universal Creator. The Adjuster’s work therefore belongs to a purpose vastly larger than the span of our present years.⁵⁵

This eternal perspective can relieve an unnecessary burden. We should take spiritual growth seriously, but we do not need to complete eternity’s work before leaving this world. Our task is to make the best use of the opportunities available now. We can establish direction, build character, learn love, develop trust, practice service, seek truth, and deepen our relationship with the Father. The unfinished work will continue.

At the same time, the promise of future growth should never become an excuse to postpone present growth. Eternity does not make today less important. It makes today more meaningful because today is part of eternity. The habits we form, the values we choose, and the relationships we cultivate become part of the foundation from which further development proceeds. We do not need to become perfect today, but we should not deliberately postpone becoming better.

The Father’s presence within gives us reason to begin now. We do not have to cross the universe before God becomes accessible. We do not need perfect theology before we can sincerely seek him. We do not need to become worthy enough to persuade the Father to come near. The divine initiative has already been taken. God has drawn near to the creature.

The challenge is increasingly to become conscious of what this means.

There will still be silence. There will still be uncertainty. We may wish for clearer answers than we receive, and we will still need faith. But perhaps the apparent silence itself protects the freedom necessary for genuine spiritual development. If the Father's presence were so overwhelming that doubt became impossible and obedience unavoidable, faith would lose much of its meaning. Instead, God can remain intimately present while allowing us enough spiritual space to choose him freely.

That choice can be renewed every day. We can turn inward for a moment before acting. We can become more honest about our motives. We can ask whether a contemplated decision expresses the values we associate with the Father. We can make room for stillness instead of filling every moment with noise. We can become more receptive to truth even when truth corrects us. We can practice choosing the higher possibility when we recognize it.

Gradually, cooperation becomes relationship, and relationship influences character. What once seemed like an abstract teaching about a divine fragment becomes increasingly relevant to how we think, decide, forgive, serve, and love. The presence of God within does not remove us from ordinary life. It gives ordinary life a deeper meaning.

The perfection mandate can therefore be understood as an invitation into partnership. The Father calls the creature toward himself and simultaneously provides his indwelling presence to guide the creature along the ascending way. The human being remains free, imperfect, experiential, and unfinished, while the divine presence remains faithful to the eternal purpose.

God does not merely wait at the destination.

God travels with us.

And if the divine presence continually offers the higher way while preserving our freedom to choose, then every meaningful decision becomes part of the partnership. The next stage in understanding the road toward perfection must therefore examine more closely the instrument through which this partnership becomes experiential: the power of human choice.

Chapter 5 — The Power of Choice

There is a profound difference between possessing the potential to become something and actually becoming it. Human beings possess extraordinary spiritual potential, but potential alone does not create character. The presence of the Thought Adjuster does not automatically make us Godlike, just as knowing the difference between truth and falsehood does not guarantee that we will choose truth. Between divine possibility and personal attainment stands one of the greatest gifts entrusted to the human personality: the power to choose.⁵⁶

Free will makes the journey toward perfection personal. God provides life, personality, opportunities for experience, spiritual guidance, and an eternal destiny, but the creature must participate. We are not carried toward perfection as unconscious passengers. We become involved in our own development through decisions. This is why even seemingly ordinary choices can possess significance beyond their immediate circumstances. They do not merely determine what happens around us. Repeated over time, they participate in determining what happens within us.⁵⁷

Every day places alternatives before us. Some choices are obviously important, such as decisions involving marriage, family, vocation, moral responsibility, or major changes in the direction of our lives. Yet much of character is formed through decisions that appear far less dramatic. We decide whether to speak truthfully when exaggeration would benefit us, whether to remain patient when irritated, whether to fulfill a responsibility when no one is watching, whether to forgive an offense or continue rehearsing it, whether to help someone when doing so inconveniences us, and whether to admit that another person was right when pride would prefer silence.

Individually, these decisions may seem small. Collectively, they become a pattern, and patterns eventually reveal character. A person does not ordinarily become trustworthy through one enormous

decision to be trustworthy. Trustworthiness develops through many smaller occasions when honesty and faithfulness are chosen. Patience grows through repeated opportunities to practice patience. Courage develops through decisions made in the presence of fear. Forgiveness becomes part of character because resentment is repeatedly surrendered rather than cultivated.

In this sense, we are continually participating in the construction of the person we are becoming.

One of the supplementary messages, “Great Freedom,” expresses this principle directly. It describes human beings as possessing enormous freedom and emphasizes that our decisions influence the kind of being we become. If the individual chooses perfection and Godlikeness as the destination, the resulting spiritual development emerges through personal decisions made in cooperation with the Thought Adjuster. The message also insists that this process can begin in present circumstances rather than waiting for ideal conditions.⁵⁸

This is an empowering idea because it means that spiritual progress is not reserved for people whose lives appear unusually favorable. We may not control many of the conditions into which we are born or many events that occur during our lives. We do not choose every loss, limitation, disappointment, opportunity, or challenge. We cannot control the decisions of other people. But within the reality we encounter, there remains an important domain of freedom: our response.

That freedom may sometimes be limited by circumstances, knowledge, maturity, or ability, but it is still meaningful. Two people can encounter similar difficulties and gradually become very different because of the meanings they assign to those experiences and the decisions they make within them. Difficulty can produce bitterness, but it can also deepen compassion. Success can produce arrogance, but it can also increase the ability to serve. Failure can lead to despair, but it can also teach humility and wisdom. The circumstance alone does not determine the spiritual result.⁵⁹

This does not mean we should blame people for every difficulty they experience or pretend that everyone has identical opportunities. Human lives differ greatly, and some individuals endure burdens that others never encounter. The point is not that circumstances are

irrelevant. The point is that circumstances do not possess absolute authority over spiritual destiny. Even under imperfect conditions, there remains some capacity to choose what meaning we will seek, what values we will protect, and what kind of person we will attempt to become.

This is why freedom carries responsibility. If our decisions contribute to character, then freedom cannot mean simply doing whatever we happen to desire. Desire itself requires examination. Some desires express legitimate needs. Others arise from fear, pride, resentment, selfishness, habit, or short-term gratification. Still others express higher aspirations toward love, truth, beauty, goodness, service, and relationship with God. Freedom gives us the opportunity to distinguish among these possibilities and decide which will govern us.

A person who automatically obeys every impulse is not necessarily free in the deepest sense. Such a person may actually be governed by appetite, anger, fear, social pressure, or habit. Self-mastery expands freedom because it creates space between impulse and action. Within that space, another possibility can be considered. We may still feel anger without allowing anger to choose our words. We may experience fear without permitting fear to decide our direction. We may feel resentment without feeding it indefinitely. The emotion remains real, but it no longer possesses unquestioned authority.⁶⁰

This is one reason the road toward perfection requires awareness. We cannot intentionally choose between possibilities we do not recognize. Early in spiritual development, many reactions occur almost automatically. Something happens, we react, and only later do we consider whether another response might have been better. With experience, reflection, prayer, and increasing self-understanding, awareness can begin to arrive earlier. Eventually, there may be a moment between stimulus and response in which the higher possibility becomes visible.

That moment can be spiritually significant.

Perhaps someone says something offensive. The familiar reaction immediately rises: defend yourself, retaliate, embarrass the other person, prove that you are right. Yet another possibility appears. You can answer without cruelty. You can remain silent until anger settles. You can correct the falsehood without attacking the person. You can

attempt to understand what produced the conflict. The existence of the higher possibility does not guarantee that it will be chosen, but consciousness of it creates a genuine moral opportunity.

The same process occurs in countless forms. We become aware that what we are about to say is not entirely true. We notice that jealousy is shaping our interpretation of another person's success. We recognize that we are withholding kindness because we want someone else to feel our displeasure. We discover that our desire to win an argument has become stronger than our desire to understand the truth. These moments of recognition are invitations. The old reaction remains available, but so does another way.

The power of choice becomes especially important because repeated decisions gradually make future decisions easier or harder. Every time we strengthen a particular pattern, we increase its familiarity. If resentment is continually rehearsed, resentment becomes easier to access. If dishonesty repeatedly solves short-term problems, dishonesty may become habitual. But the same principle works in the other direction. If we repeatedly choose patience, patience becomes more accessible. If we practice generosity, generosity becomes increasingly natural. If we regularly examine our motives honestly, self-deception becomes more difficult to maintain.

Character can therefore be understood partly as accumulated choice.

This does not mean that one bad decision permanently defines us. If it did, growth would be nearly impossible. Nor does one good decision establish mature character. Character develops through continuity. What matters is the direction in which choices increasingly move. A person may fall many times while sincerely learning to walk in a new way. The existence of failure does not cancel the significance of the effort to rise again.

"Practice Brings Perfection" captures this beautifully through the image of a child learning to walk. The child falls, rises, attempts another step, and gradually develops the ability that once seemed beyond reach. The message applies the same principle to spiritual growth, encouraging persistence rather than discouragement and describing progress as occurring "step by tiny step." The lesson is not that our choices are unimportant because mistakes are inevitable. It is that choices are so

important that we should continue making better ones even after we fail.⁶¹

Failure itself creates another choice. Once we recognize that we acted poorly, what will we do next? We can deny responsibility, blame someone else, defend the behavior, or pretend nothing happened. Or we can acknowledge the mistake, learn from it, make amends where possible, forgive ourselves, and prepare to respond differently next time. The original mistake cannot always be undone, but the response to the mistake becomes part of what happens next.

This is where forgiveness and choice meet. Forgiveness is often treated primarily as an emotion, but in many cases it begins as a decision before the emotions have fully changed. A person may decide not to seek revenge while still feeling deeply wounded. The emotional healing may take much longer. Similarly, self-forgiveness does not mean pretending that our actions were acceptable. It means refusing to make a past failure the permanent definition of who we are allowed to become.

“Inner Freedom” describes forgiveness as a path toward release from anger, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation. It encourages the individual to forgive both others and oneself for past reactions that were less than ideal, while taking responsibility for future conduct. This is an important aspect of free will because a person psychologically imprisoned by the past may continue allowing yesterday’s decisions to dictate tomorrow’s possibilities.⁶²

Freedom allows us to say, in effect, “That was what I chose then, but it does not have to be what I choose now.”

This possibility of choosing again is one of the great mercies of evolutionary existence. Every new moment provides some opportunity, however small, to alter direction. The farther we have traveled in an unhealthy direction, the more difficult correction may become, but the principle remains. A decision can interrupt a pattern. Another decision can reinforce the new direction. Gradually, a different way of living can emerge.

The Thought Adjuster’s role within this process gives choice an even deeper significance. Divine guidance does not merely present abstract ideals. It continually seeks to elevate the meanings and values recognized by the human mind. “Augment the Quality of Your

Decisions” describes the human-divine relationship as one in which the individual increasingly recognizes truth, beauty, and goodness and acts upon those values in cooperation with divine leading. The message presents these experiences and choices as contributing to the evolving soul.⁶³

If this is so, then a decision can have two dimensions. There is the external result, which may be visible to others, and there is the internal spiritual value of the choice. We naturally pay great attention to visible outcomes because earthly life requires practical results. But spiritual development also concerns motive, meaning, and intention. Two outwardly similar actions may therefore possess very different inner values.

A person may give money in order to receive praise, while another gives quietly because someone genuinely needs help. The outward action is similar, but the motives differ. Someone may remain silent during a conflict because of fear, while another remains silent because wisdom recognizes that speaking in anger would cause unnecessary harm. Again, the outward behavior looks similar while the inner decision is different. Godlike character develops not only through what we do but through why we increasingly choose to do it.⁶⁴

This is why perfection cannot be achieved merely by constructing an impressive public image. Other people can see only a fraction of our motives. We can appear patient while inwardly cultivating contempt, appear generous while seeking recognition, or speak spiritual language while protecting pride. The Father’s work reaches beneath appearance because genuine character cannot ultimately be separated from the inner meanings we assign to our choices.

The reverse is also important. Other people may misunderstand a sincere decision. A loving boundary may be interpreted as rejection. A necessary correction may be called unkind. A decision to change direction may disappoint people who benefited from our former behavior. Choosing the higher path does not guarantee universal approval. If our spiritual life depends entirely upon how others evaluate us, social pressure will eventually compete with conscience.

This is why discernment requires courage. Sometimes the right decision is supported by everyone around us; sometimes it is not. We must learn to listen to advice without surrendering responsibility for

our own moral choices. Wise counsel can protect us from self-deception, but another human being cannot live our spiritual life for us. Eventually, each person must stand within the freedom God has given and choose.

The supplementary teaching “The Seasons of Life” adds another dimension to this responsibility by describing seasons of planning, doing, and resting. It emphasizes the importance of thinking before acting, having the courage to act when action is required, and recognizing that rest and spiritual renewal are also necessary. It encourages discernment of the appropriate season while remaining receptive to the Spirit Within and to useful counsel. This balance is important because choice does not always mean immediate action. Sometimes wisdom chooses to wait.⁶⁵

There are moments when courage requires movement and others when maturity requires patience. There are decisions that should be made quickly because moral clarity is already sufficient, and others that deserve reflection because important facts remain unknown. There are times to speak and times to remain silent, times to persist and times to change direction, times to work intensely and times to rest. Spiritual maturity does not reduce life to one response that fits every circumstance. It develops the discernment needed to choose appropriately within changing conditions.

Jesus demonstrated this flexibility throughout his life. His devotion to the Father did not produce mechanical behavior. He could be gentle or firm, silent or outspoken, active or withdrawn, depending upon the needs of the situation. One supplementary message warns against attempting merely to imitate the outward details of Jesus’ life and instead encourages the individual to learn from his spiritual adaptability and consistent dedication to the Father’s will. The goal is not to ask what Jesus literally did in an unrelated historical circumstance, but what the principles demonstrated in his life might require from us here and now.⁶⁶

This makes spiritual decision-making both more difficult and more meaningful. Rules can tell us much, but no finite collection of rules can anticipate every situation in an evolving life. Character must eventually learn to apply values. Love, for example, does not always look the same. Sometimes love comforts; sometimes it corrects. Sometimes it gives;

sometimes it refuses to enable harmful behavior. Sometimes it speaks; sometimes it listens. The value remains constant while its wise expression depends upon circumstances.

Our decisions therefore improve as our understanding of values improves. We do not simply need stronger willpower. We need greater wisdom. A person can pursue the wrong goal with tremendous determination. The highest use of will requires both sincerity and increasing understanding. This is why spiritual growth involves mind, soul, experience, and divine guidance together.

There is also a social dimension to choice. Our decisions rarely affect only ourselves. Words influence other people. Attitudes alter relationships. Parents shape children. Children influence families. Workers affect colleagues. Leaders affect communities. A single decision can produce consequences that travel much farther than the individual initially realizes. The freedom to choose therefore carries an opportunity to contribute either constructively or destructively to the environment in which others must make their own choices.

“The River” provides a useful image here. It describes the individual as moving within the larger current of divine purpose while retaining freedom to move differently within that current. Choices aligned with love, truth, beauty, and goodness do more than move the individual toward perfection; they contribute something beneficial to the larger evolutionary journey. We are individual travelers, but we do not travel alone.⁶⁷

This gives service a natural place within freedom. As we become more spiritually mature, our decisions increasingly take into account not only what we want but what our choices mean for others. The question gradually expands from “What benefits me?” to “What is good?” and eventually to “How can my freedom contribute to the good of everyone involved?” This does not mean ignoring legitimate personal needs. Healthy spiritual life does not require self-erasure. It means that the self increasingly recognizes itself as part of a larger family.

Love is what allows freedom to become constructive rather than merely self-directed. Without love, freedom can become the ability to pursue desire regardless of consequence. With love, freedom becomes the ability to choose what creates, heals, strengthens, teaches, serves, and uplifts. The greater our freedom becomes, the greater the

possibilities for both good and harm, which is why spiritual maturity must grow alongside it.

The perfection mandate therefore depends upon freedom. Godlikeness cannot be meaningfully developed if the creature has no genuine opportunity to choose something else. Love becomes spiritually meaningful because hatred, indifference, and selfishness remain possible. Courage matters because fear exists. Truthfulness matters because deception is available. Service has value because we could have chosen only ourselves.⁶⁸

Every higher choice represents a small victory of divine possibility within evolutionary life.

No single decision will complete the journey. Even the supreme decision to seek God and do the Father's will opens the road rather than ending it. But once that orientation has been established, every ordinary day becomes filled with opportunities to give it expression. The supreme choice is confirmed through smaller choices, and those smaller choices gradually become character.

This is why the road toward perfection is simultaneously immense and immediate. Its ultimate destination lies beyond anything we can presently comprehend, yet the part of the road entrusted to us is always here. We cannot choose tomorrow's response today, nor can we rewrite yesterday's decision. We can learn from the past and prepare for the future, but the actual exercise of free will occurs in the present.

What will I do with the truth I can recognize now? What will I do with the person standing before me now? What will I do with this anger, this opportunity, this responsibility, this fear, this mistake, this moment in which another possibility has become visible?

These questions bring eternity into ordinary life.

The power of choice is therefore much more than the ability to select among alternatives. It is the means through which potential becomes experience and experience becomes character. Through choice, the human will can increasingly cooperate with the divine will. Through repeated choice, truth can become truthfulness, love can become loving character, courage can become steadfastness, and the desire for perfection can gradually become the reality of an evolving soul.

Wilmen T.

We were not created perfect in the sense of being finished. We were created with the freedom to participate in becoming perfect.

And that participation begins wherever we are, with the next choice we are capable of making.

Chapter 6 — Perfect in Our Day and Time

If perfection is the destination of an evolutionary journey extending far beyond mortal life, we may reasonably ask what the Father's command means for us today. We are not finalizers standing in the perfected presence of the Universal Father. We are human beings living on an evolutionary world, carrying physical needs, emotional histories, incomplete knowledge, social responsibilities, and limited experience. We are influenced by families, cultures, education, opportunities, disappointments, and circumstances we did not choose. Whatever perfection means for us now must take these realities seriously.

This does not weaken the Father's command. It helps us understand it. A divine mandate directed toward evolutionary creatures must necessarily operate within an evolutionary process. We cannot be expected to possess today what can only be acquired through ages of experience, but we can respond faithfully to the possibilities available at our present stage. Perfection in mortal life must therefore be understood not as the completion of the eternal journey but as increasingly wholehearted faithfulness to the highest spiritual possibilities available to us now.

One of the supplementary teachings used in preparing this book expresses the idea as being "perfect in your own day and time." The message emphasizes that absolute perfection is not attainable by evolutionary mortals during earthly life and instead points toward a perfection appropriate to the developmental circumstances in which a person actually lives. It later presents Jesus as the supreme demonstration of human attunement to the indwelling divine presence and encourages the study of his courage, compassion, righteous living, and fatherly love.⁶⁹

The expression can easily be misunderstood if it is taken to mean that whatever we currently are is already sufficient. That is not its implication. Evolutionary perfection does not mean complacency. It

does not say, “I am doing the best I can,” when we know that we are refusing to make an effort. Nor does it turn our limitations into excuses for selfishness, dishonesty, cruelty, or indifference. The idea instead recognizes that genuine spiritual responsibility must take account of actual capacity, actual understanding, actual opportunity, and actual freedom.

Consider again the development of a child. We do not judge a child’s reading ability according to the standard of a university professor, yet we still expect the child to learn. We recognize present capacity while encouraging future development. If the child refuses to practice, ignores instruction, and makes no effort, the problem is not that the child has failed to read at a university level. The problem is that the child is refusing the growth appropriate to the present stage. Spiritual development follows a similar principle.

The question, then, is not whether we have already attained the wisdom of eternity. The more useful question is whether we are responding faithfully to the truth we can presently recognize. Are we becoming more willing to learn? Are we becoming more honest about our motives? Are we treating people with greater dignity? Are we developing greater self-mastery? Are we learning to forgive? Are we increasingly willing to choose the Father’s will when we recognize it? These are signs of movement, and movement matters in an evolutionary universe.

This also means that the standard appropriate to one person cannot always be applied mechanically to another. Human beings differ in experience, maturity, knowledge, opportunities, and circumstances. A truth obvious to one person may only be beginning to become visible to another. Someone who has practiced forgiveness for decades may possess capacities that a deeply wounded person is only beginning to develop. One individual may have received extensive spiritual education while another has scarcely considered the possibility of an inner life. Divine justice must surely comprehend differences that human judgment frequently ignores.

Recognizing these differences should make us slower to condemn others and more serious about our own growth. It is easy to measure someone else against the light we possess while forgetting that responsibility corresponds in part to the light available to the individual.

The Father knows what each child understands, what each child has endured, what possibilities have genuinely become available, and what motives lie behind choices that may be misunderstood by everyone else.

This does not make morality relative. Truth does not become false because someone does not yet understand it, and cruelty does not become goodness because a culture approves of it. The distinction is between the reality of the divine standard and the creature's present capacity to comprehend and embody that standard. The goal remains Godlikeness. Our ability to express it grows progressively.

This is one reason comparison can become so spiritually distracting. We may look at someone who appears more patient, disciplined, successful, knowledgeable, or spiritually mature and conclude that we are failing. Or we may look at someone struggling more visibly than we are and congratulate ourselves on our superiority. Neither comparison tells us very much about our own relationship with the Father.

The more meaningful comparison is between what we were capable of recognizing yesterday and what we are capable of choosing today. Have we become a little more truthful? Do we recover from anger more quickly? Are we more willing to admit mistakes? Do we recognize selfish motives sooner? Has compassion begun to interrupt judgment? Are we learning to listen? Can we remain peaceful in circumstances that once immediately disturbed us? These changes may be difficult to measure, but they represent the kind of progressive transformation that eventually becomes character.

The message "Days" is particularly helpful here because it acknowledges that spiritual life does not always feel like progress. There are days when purpose seems clear and faith feels natural, followed by days when ordinary responsibilities and worldly standards make life seem inadequate. The message points to ordinary people continuing to work, raise children, survive, learn, and grow even when their lives do not appear extraordinary.⁷⁰

This is important because we often confuse spiritual progress with spiritual emotion. We may assume that a day filled with inspiration was spiritually successful while a day filled with routine obligations was not. Yet a person may feel profoundly inspired and make few meaningful choices, while another person may feel tired, distracted, and unremarkable but still faithfully care for a family, keep a promise,

perform honest work, control an angry reaction, and help someone in need. Spiritual value cannot be measured simply by intensity of feeling.

Some of the most important growth may occur during periods that feel spiritually ordinary. Character often develops quietly. A parent gets up again in the night to care for a child. A worker chooses honesty when dishonesty would never have been discovered. Someone continues to care for an aging relative despite exhaustion. A person listens patiently to someone who needs to speak. Another refuses to repeat harmful gossip. None of these moments may produce a dramatic spiritual sensation, yet each can express values that belong to the road toward perfection.

“Where You Stand” reinforces this understanding by presenting ordinary responsibilities as genuine opportunities for experience. It specifically refers to raising children and providing for a family as examples of experiences through which important lessons may be learned, and it points to Jesus’ own period of family responsibility before his public ministry. Spiritual life therefore does not begin after our responsibilities are completed. Those responsibilities may themselves be part of our spiritual education.⁷¹

This principle applies equally to work. Many people spend a substantial portion of mortal life performing tasks they would not describe as spiritual. Yet “The Benefits of Work” portrays work as an environment in which discipline, responsibility, perseverance, ethics, and service can develop. It emphasizes doing one’s best in present circumstances and describes sincere work as part of the continuing effort to manifest increasing perfection.⁷²

The spiritual question is therefore not simply what kind of work we perform but what kind of person we become while performing it. Do we become more dependable or more careless? More honest or more willing to deceive? More respectful of others or more contemptuous? Do we contribute to the well-being of those around us? Can we perform an ordinary responsibility with excellence even when recognition is unlikely?

This does not mean that everyone should remain indefinitely in circumstances that prevent healthy growth. There are times to seek another job, leave an unhealthy environment, change direction, pursue education, establish boundaries, or create something new. Spirituality

does not require passive acceptance of every condition. But until circumstances change, the present moment still contains choices. We can ask what values can be expressed here, what lessons can be learned here, and what part of our character can be developed here.

The same applies to family life. Families can provide extraordinary opportunities for love, but they can also expose impatience, pride, fear, resentment, selfishness, and unresolved wounds. People who appear exceptionally kind in public may discover that maintaining kindness at home is much more difficult. Familiarity removes some of the social restraints that govern public behavior, and family relationships can therefore reveal aspects of character that remain hidden elsewhere.

This revelation should not necessarily discourage us. It can become instruction. The person who irritates us repeatedly may expose an impatience we need to address. A child may reveal how much we still want control. A spouse may unintentionally uncover our difficulty admitting error. An aging parent may test our capacity for patience and service. Family life is not automatically spiritual simply because it is family life, but it can become one of the most powerful classrooms available to us.

Friendships offer similar opportunities. A genuine friend may support us, but may also tell us something we do not want to hear. We may be called to celebrate another person's success without jealousy, remain present during difficulty without attempting to make everything about ourselves, forgive disappointment, or establish healthy boundaries when necessary. Love develops through these realities rather than through an abstract idea of relationships.

Even conflict can become part of the road toward perfection. Conflict reveals what happens when our desires meet the desires of another person. It can expose the need to be right, the fear of being misunderstood, the desire to control, or the tendency to withdraw. Yet conflict also creates opportunities for listening, courage, honesty, patience, forgiveness, and mutual understanding. The existence of disagreement does not automatically mean a relationship has failed. The way disagreement is handled may reveal whether growth is occurring.

This is where being perfect in our day and time becomes intensely practical. It means asking what the highest available response is within the situation actually before us. Not the response we imagine we would

make if we were already spiritually advanced, but the best response we can sincerely choose now. Perhaps we cannot yet feel complete forgiveness, but we can choose not to retaliate. Perhaps we cannot eliminate fear, but we can take one courageous step. Perhaps we do not know how to love someone deeply, but we can refrain from deliberately causing harm. Perhaps we cannot resolve a conflict today, but we can speak honestly without cruelty.

A small sincere step is not meaningless because a larger step will eventually be required. Evolution proceeds through stages.

This perspective also protects us from spiritual perfectionism. If we believe every imperfect reaction proves that we are failing the Father, we may become more occupied with monitoring ourselves than with actually loving others. Spiritual life then becomes an endless examination of personal inadequacy. Ironically, the desire to become perfect can become centered almost entirely upon the self.

The Father's perfection points us in the opposite direction. The more Godlike character becomes, the more love naturally extends outward. Growth should gradually make us more useful, not merely more self-conscious. We should become increasingly capable of seeing other people, understanding their needs, serving wisely, forgiving generously, and contributing something good to the world around us.⁷³

"Effort and Struggle" connects this growth with faith and loving service. It describes spiritual development as a gradual process through which the individual becomes increasingly reflective of God in tolerance, forgiveness, acceptance, and service toward others who are traveling the same path. The measure of spiritual progress therefore cannot be confined to private religious experience. It eventually becomes visible in relationships.⁷⁴

At the same time, growth requires balance. A person cannot sustainably serve others while ignoring every legitimate need for rest, reflection, and renewal. "The Seasons of Life" describes planning, action, and rest as necessary seasons and specifically includes worship, rest, and play as meaningful parts of a balanced human life. This is important because spiritual seriousness can sometimes become excessive striving.⁷⁵

Rest is not automatically laziness. There are moments when stopping is wiser than continuing. The body requires restoration, the

mind needs quiet, and emotional exhaustion can distort judgment. Even the desire to serve can become unhealthy if it is driven by guilt, fear, or an inability to recognize personal limits. Becoming perfect does not mean becoming endlessly productive. The Father's purpose includes the development of the whole personality.

Planning also has spiritual value. Faith does not require carelessness about the future. We can consider consequences, seek information, consult wise people, organize responsibilities, and prepare for what is likely to come. The supplementary teaching on the seasons of life presents planning as a legitimate human capacity while also emphasizing that planning must eventually give way to action. A plan never acted upon cannot produce experience.⁷⁶

Then comes the season of doing. Growth requires the courage to enter experience without guarantees. We cannot know every consequence before making a decision. Sometimes we must act with the best understanding available and remain willing to learn from what follows. This willingness is part of evolutionary life. If we waited until certainty was complete, many important decisions would never be made.

The rhythm of planning, doing, learning, resting, and beginning again reflects the larger rhythm of growth. There are times of rapid development and times when little seems to change. There are moments of clarity and periods of uncertainty. Spiritual maturity learns not to demand that every season look the same.

This is especially important during discouragement. We may look at ourselves after years of spiritual interest and wonder why certain weaknesses remain. Perhaps we still become impatient, still worry excessively, still struggle to forgive, or still fall into familiar habits. The existence of continuing weakness does not mean nothing has changed. We should look more carefully. Perhaps we recognize the pattern sooner. Perhaps we apologize faster. Perhaps we no longer justify behavior we once defended. Perhaps the period between falling and rising has become shorter.

Growth can be real before it is complete.

"Practice Brings Perfection" repeatedly emphasizes this patient approach. It acknowledges that increasing spiritual awareness can actually make people more conscious of their shortcomings, which may

temporarily make them feel less advanced rather than more. Yet the message encourages continued practice without excessive stress, comparing the process to learning step by step. This is a valuable reminder that greater awareness of imperfection may itself be evidence of growth.⁷⁷

A person standing in a dark room may believe everything is clean because little can be seen. When light enters, dust becomes visible. The light did not create the dust; it revealed what was already present. Spiritual illumination can operate similarly. As our ideals become higher and self-awareness increases, attitudes we once considered normal may become uncomfortable. This discomfort can be interpreted as failure, but it may actually represent a more refined conscience.

The appropriate response is neither denial nor despair. It is cooperation. We recognize what has become visible, bring it honestly before God, and begin working with the next available choice. The Father is not surprised by discoveries about ourselves that surprise us. The divine presence has known our potential and our limitations from the beginning.

Being perfect in our day and time therefore means living sincerely at the growing edge of our spiritual capacity. It means neither pretending to have attained what we have not attained nor refusing to become what we are already capable of becoming. It means allowing today's understanding to become today's responsibility.

Tomorrow may bring greater understanding and therefore greater responsibility. What satisfies our conscience today may eventually prove inadequate as our spiritual vision expands. This is not hypocrisy; it is growth, provided we remain sincere. We should expect our moral and spiritual understanding to deepen. A mature faith should be capable of correction.

This also means we should be patient with earlier versions of ourselves. We may look back and wonder how we once believed certain things, tolerated certain attitudes, or made particular decisions. Regret can be useful if it teaches us, but endless condemnation of the person we once were ignores the reality of evolution. We can acknowledge harm, make amends where possible, and still be grateful that greater understanding has emerged.

The same generosity should influence the way we view others. Someone standing where we stood ten years ago may need truth, but may also need the patience that allowed us time to grow. This does not mean withholding necessary correction. It means remembering that transformation cannot always be forced from outside. We can teach, encourage, challenge, model, and love, but each person must eventually choose.

The perfection mandate is therefore simultaneously universal and personal. The destination is shared: Godlikeness. Yet the path unfolds through the unique experiences of each personality. One person learns patience through parenting, another through illness, another through difficult work, another through leadership, another through failure. One learns courage by speaking, another by remaining silent. One learns service by giving, another by learning to receive with humility.

The Father can use the entire range of human experience because the spiritual value lies not merely in what happens but in what the individual chooses to make of what happens.

Jesus' life provides the highest illustration of this principle. His perfection was not expressed by avoiding ordinary human existence. He experienced family responsibility, work, friendship, misunderstanding, disappointment, opposition, physical exhaustion, sorrow, and the uncertainty inherent in human life. The significance of his example lies partly in the fact that these experiences became the setting in which his devotion to the Father was expressed.⁷⁸

This is why his life should inspire rather than discourage us. We are not asked to reproduce his historical circumstances. We are asked to discover how the same fundamental orientation toward the Father can increasingly govern our circumstances. The question is not, "Can I live the exact life Jesus lived?" We cannot. The more useful question is, "Can I bring the Father into the life I have been given?"⁷⁹

That question brings the perfection mandate into the present.

Can I be a little more patient in this conversation? Can I perform this responsibility more faithfully? Can I forgive this person one step further? Can I tell the truth here? Can I admit that I was wrong? Can I listen instead of immediately defending myself? Can I rest without guilt when rest is genuinely needed? Can I serve without needing

recognition? Can I recognize another person as a child of the same Father?

None of these questions asks whether we have completed the journey. They ask whether we are traveling.

Perfection in our day and time is therefore not a lesser substitute for the Father's eternal perfection. It is the way an evolutionary creature begins participating in that eternal destiny. The absolute goal remains ahead, but the values of that goal can increasingly enter the present. Truth can be chosen now. Goodness can be expressed now. Beauty can be created now. Mercy can be offered now. Love can be practiced now. The Father's will can be chosen now.

We cannot become everything today that eternity intends us to become.

But we can become something today that we were not yesterday.

And if each stage of the journey is lived with sincerity, courage, teachability, and increasing cooperation with the Father within, then mortal life becomes exactly what it was meant to be: not the completion of perfection, but its genuine beginning.

The clearest demonstration that such a life is possible is not found in theory. It is found in a human life actually lived on this world. To understand what progressive Godlikeness can look like when translated into courage, love, faith, service, self-mastery, and complete dedication to the Father, we must now turn more fully to Jesus—the living example of the way.

Chapter 7 — Jesus: The Living Example

The command to become perfect can remain abstract until we encounter a life in which devotion to the Father was actually lived. Principles such as love, faith, courage, mercy, self-mastery, service, and dedication to God are easy to admire as ideals, but their deeper meaning becomes clearer when we see how they operate within the uncertainties and demands of human existence. For this reason, the life of Jesus occupies a central place in understanding the journey toward perfection. In him, the pursuit of the Father was not separated from ordinary human life but expressed through it, demonstrating how spiritual purpose can become the organizing principle of a life lived amid responsibility, relationship, difficulty, and change.⁸⁰

Jesus should not be approached merely as an impossible standard against which imperfect people measure their failures. If his life becomes only a demonstration of how far beneath him everyone else stands, we may admire him without learning how to follow the direction he revealed. His life has greater value for us when it becomes a revelation of what human existence can increasingly become when the personality is wholeheartedly oriented toward the Father. This does not mean that we can reproduce Jesus' life. We were not born into his historical circumstances, do not possess his particular responsibilities, and are not called to perform his unique mission. Mechanical imitation would misunderstand the individuality that God gives to personality. The objective is not to become another Jesus, but to discover what Jesus' relationship with the Father teaches us about becoming the highest and most faithful realization of ourselves.⁸¹

One of the supplementary messages considered in preparing this book makes this distinction particularly well. "Great Freedom" encourages the study of Jesus while directing attention away from literal imitation of his outward actions and toward the adaptability of his life and his continuing dedication to doing the Father's will within changing

circumstances. This distinction is essential. Jesus did not leave behind a script specifying the exact response every person should make in every future circumstance. He revealed a way of living from which enduring spiritual principles can be learned and intelligently applied.⁸²

At the center of that way of living was his relationship with the Father. Jesus did not merely believe that God existed; he lived with God as Father. This relationship gave unity to his life. Prayer, service, teaching, decision-making, courage, mercy, and love were not separate religious activities but expressions of an underlying consciousness of sonship and trust. This changes how we understand his perfection. If we look only for flawless outward behavior, we may miss the spiritual center from which his actions arose. Jesus' life was not spiritually powerful because he avoided the realities of being human. He lived among them. He experienced physical needs, responsibility, disappointment, misunderstanding, opposition, grief, friendship, work, fatigue, and the consequences of living among imperfect people. His devotion to the Father was demonstrated within these realities rather than apart from them.⁸³

This is important because we sometimes imagine spirituality as a form of escape. We picture the spiritually advanced person as increasingly untouched by ordinary problems, as though closeness to God should remove the complications of human life. Jesus presents another picture. Spiritual maturity does not necessarily eliminate difficulty; it changes the quality with which difficulty is encountered. A person may therefore be deeply spiritual and still experience sorrow. Faith does not require the absence of disappointment, courage does not require the absence of fear or danger, and forgiveness does not mean that injury never occurred. Patience itself exists because circumstances arise in which impatience is possible. Jesus' life demonstrates that the presence of human difficulty does not indicate the absence of God.⁸⁴

His early life is especially important in this regard. Before his public ministry, there were years of ordinary responsibility. Family obligations, work, relationships, decisions, and gradual preparation preceded the period most often remembered. "Where You Stand," one of the supplementary Thought Adjuster messages, specifically points to Jesus' experience of family responsibility before beginning his work as a teacher and uses this as an example of the value of ordinary human

experience. Those years prevent us from dividing life too sharply into spiritual and nonspiritual categories. Providing for a family can be spiritual. Learning responsibility can be spiritual. Honest work, caring for another person, and learning patience with people we know intimately can all become spiritually significant when they participate in the development and expression of truth, beauty, goodness, love, responsibility, and service.⁸⁵

Jesus did not need to wait for public ministry before his relationship with the Father mattered, and neither do we. This is one of the most practical lessons of his life. We often imagine that our true spiritual purpose lies somewhere ahead and will begin when circumstances change, responsibilities become lighter, our understanding becomes greater, or some special opportunity finally appears. Yet the years of Jesus' life before his public work remind us that preparation itself belongs to purpose. What we are becoming before a major opportunity arrives may determine what we are capable of doing when it does arrive.⁸⁶

There is also a lesson in patience. Human ambition often wants to move quickly. Once we glimpse something meaningful, we may want immediate results, but spiritual growth develops according to deeper rhythms. Wisdom cannot always be hurried because wisdom depends partly upon experience, and experience unfolds through time. Jesus' life demonstrates a willingness to allow preparation, maturity, and circumstance to develop without forcing every possibility prematurely. This patience was not passivity. When the appropriate moment arrived, Jesus acted decisively. He could wait when waiting was wise and move when action was required. This balance reflects the principle discussed in "The Seasons of Life," which describes times for planning, doing, and resting and connects maturity with recognizing the appropriate season.⁸⁷

Such discernment is more difficult than following a rigid formula. A rule can tell us always to act or always to wait, but wisdom must determine which response serves the higher purpose in a particular situation. Jesus' life repeatedly demonstrates this flexibility. He could withdraw from crowds and later return to serve them. He could answer questions and at other times refuse to be drawn into useless controversy. He could show tenderness toward weakness while being

direct with hypocrisy. His behavior varied because love and wisdom respond to persons and circumstances rather than merely repeating a technique.⁸⁸

This is one reason genuine Godlikeness should not make everyone behave identically. The values of the Father are constant, but their expression passes through unique personalities and changing circumstances. Courage in one person may require speaking publicly, while in another it may require having a difficult private conversation. Service may lead one person toward teaching and another toward quiet caregiving. One person may express truth through scholarship, another through craftsmanship, another through parenthood, and another through friendship. Spiritual unity does not require uniformity. The more faithfully we become aligned with divine values, the more those values can be expressed through the distinctive personality the Father has given each of us.⁸⁹

Jesus also demonstrates that love is more demanding than simple approval. He loved people without pretending that everything they believed or did was equally good. Love could be compassionate without becoming dishonest, and he could recognize weakness while still calling people toward something higher. This balance is crucial because spiritual love is sometimes confused with the refusal to make moral distinctions. To love another person as a child of God does not require approving every decision that person makes, nor does disagreement require hatred. Mature love can respect dignity while recognizing error, forgive without pretending that no harm occurred, establish boundaries without wishing destruction upon the person outside them, and speak truth without taking pleasure in humiliation.⁹⁰

One of the supplementary messages, “Be You Perfect in Your Own Day and Time,” points particularly to Jesus’ courage, compassion, righteous living, and fatherly love, including love toward those who opposed him. This fatherly quality of love is especially significant because it asks more than how we happen to feel about another person. It asks what would genuinely serve that person’s highest good. Feelings matter, but love cannot depend entirely upon them. We naturally feel affection toward some people more easily than others. Jesus’ example expands love beyond personal attraction. A person can choose goodwill even when affection is absent, refuse hatred even when reconciliation is

impossible, and desire another person's ultimate good while still protecting oneself from harmful behavior. Love thereby becomes a spiritual orientation of the will rather than merely an emotion.⁹¹

This becomes especially important when we consider enemies. Loving an enemy does not mean declaring the enemy's actions good. It means refusing to allow another person's hatred to determine the kind of person we will become. If hatred automatically produces hatred in return, the original wrongdoing has achieved another victory because it has reproduced itself within us. "The Power of Connection" presents divine love as a transformative power and specifically encourages prayer and loving intention even toward enemies, connecting this practice with becoming increasingly Godlike through relationship with the divine Source. Whatever practical form such love takes in a particular situation, the principle remains profound: we do not overcome hatred merely by changing the target of hatred.⁹²

Jesus' capacity for mercy likewise reveals something important about perfection. A perfection centered primarily on personal faultlessness can easily become judgmental because the person begins measuring everyone else against the standard he or she is attempting to maintain. Divine perfection, however, includes mercy. The more genuinely Godlike a person becomes, the more deeply that person should understand the reality of evolutionary weakness. This does not eliminate accountability. Mercy and responsibility can coexist, and mercy becomes meaningful precisely because something real may need forgiveness. The Father's patience with evolutionary children provides a model for our patience with one another. We can recognize wrongdoing while still seeing the person as more than the wrongdoing.⁹³

Jesus repeatedly saw possibilities in people that others overlooked. Social standing, reputation, failure, and outward appearance did not determine a person's ultimate value. This way of seeing others challenges one of the strongest tendencies of human judgment: reducing a person to the most visible fact we know about them. We identify someone by a failure, an opinion, a social category, a weakness, or an offense and then allow that fact to become the entire person in our minds. Divine love sees more. It recognizes what is presently real while also recognizing potential. If we wish to become like the Father,

we must gradually learn to see people not only according to what they have been but also according to what they may become.⁹⁴

Jesus' example also teaches us something about self-mastery. Spiritual strength is not the absence of strong emotion; it is the ability to keep emotion in proper relationship with higher purpose. Anger, fear, sorrow, disappointment, affection, and enthusiasm belong to human experience. The objective is not emotional numbness but increasing freedom from being controlled blindly by emotional reactions. "The Road to Perfection" identifies impatience, jealousy, fear, anger, resentment, and unforgiveness as tendencies requiring self-discipline and connects their progressive transformation with love, joy, compassion, and patience. Jesus demonstrates the positive side of this development: emotional life can serve rather than rule spiritual purpose.⁹⁵

Self-mastery also allowed Jesus to resist the pressure to define himself through other people's opinions. Praise did not become his identity, and criticism did not determine his worth. This is an important aspect of spiritual freedom because much human behavior is shaped by the desire for approval. We may know what is right yet hesitate because we fear rejection, embarrassment, or misunderstanding. The more deeply identity becomes rooted in relationship with the Father, the less absolute the power of public opinion becomes. This does not mean becoming indifferent to feedback, because wise people remain teachable. It means recognizing the difference between listening to others and allowing others to determine our value.⁹⁶

The same principle can become increasingly meaningful for us. If God is truly our Father, human approval cannot be the final measure of our worth. Success cannot create our ultimate value, and failure cannot destroy it. This foundation gives us greater freedom to learn because admitting a mistake no longer threatens our entire identity. We can acknowledge that we were wrong without concluding that we are worthless. Humility becomes easier when worth is secure, and this helps explain why true spiritual maturity can combine confidence and humility. Confidence without humility becomes arrogance, while humility without a secure sense of value can deteriorate into self-devaluation. Jesus demonstrated neither extreme. His confidence did

not require superiority, and his humility did not require pretending to be less than he was.⁹⁷

The Father's children can aspire to the same balance. We can acknowledge our abilities without believing they make us more valuable than others, and we can acknowledge weaknesses without believing they erase our value. We can accept praise without becoming dependent upon it and correction without being destroyed by it. Service then becomes freer because it no longer needs to prove something about us. We can help because help is needed rather than merely because we want to be recognized as helpful, and we can do good without requiring an audience. This quiet freedom is one of the marks of increasingly mature character.

Jesus' life was fundamentally a life of service, yet his service was not frantic activity. He did not attempt to satisfy every demand placed upon him. He withdrew, rested, prayed, selected priorities, and allowed some requests to remain unanswered. This is important for anyone who equates spiritual devotion with constant availability. Love requires wisdom because we cannot serve every person in every way at every moment. Mortal resources are limited. Time, physical energy, emotional capacity, and material resources must be used intelligently. Sometimes the most loving response is immediate assistance; sometimes it is teaching; sometimes it is allowing another person to exercise responsibility. The objective is not to perform the maximum possible number of helpful actions but to become increasingly responsive to what love and wisdom require.⁹⁸

This returns us to the Father's will. Jesus' greatness cannot be separated from his continuing orientation toward that will. He did not merely perform admirable acts. His life possessed spiritual unity because those acts emerged from a central devotion. The Father was not one interest among many. Relationship with the Father provided the organizing center around which everything else found its proper place. Our lives may feel much more fragmented. Work, family, finances, health, relationships, responsibilities, ambitions, entertainment, and spiritual concerns compete for attention, and we may imagine that becoming spiritual means eliminating most of these interests. Jesus suggests another possibility: life can become integrated around a central purpose.⁹⁹

Work remains work, family remains family, and practical responsibilities remain practical responsibilities, but all of them can gradually be brought into relationship with the question of who we are becoming before God. We can work honestly because truth matters, care for family because love matters, manage resources responsibly because stewardship matters, rest because the human organism has legitimate limits, and pursue goals without allowing achievement to become our god. The spiritual life does not need to occupy every minute as a conscious religious thought. It can become the orientation through which every part of life acquires deeper meaning.¹⁰⁰

This is perhaps one of the greatest lessons Jesus offers the person seeking perfection. Godlikeness is not primarily theatrical, nor is it measured by how spiritual a person appears. It becomes visible through the quality of a life: how truth is treated, how people are treated, how responsibility is carried, how power is used, how disappointment is faced, how forgiveness is offered, how success is handled, how suffering is endured, and how faithfully the individual continues to seek the Father. We will not do these things as Jesus did them at the beginning of our journey, and that is precisely why his life remains before us as an example rather than as a reason for despair. We study him not to discover how badly we compare but to see more clearly the direction in which human personality can grow.¹⁰¹

“A Sense of Duty” encourages the individual to hold before the mind the highest conception of divine character and then consider what changes would make one increasingly reflective of that ideal. Jesus makes that exercise less abstract. In his life we can observe trust, courage, mercy, patience, truthfulness, service, self-mastery, and devotion to the Father expressed within human experience. We can then bring those qualities into the circumstances of our own lives by asking what greater trust would look like here, what courage requires in a decision we are avoiding, what mercy would change about a resentment we are carrying, what devotion to truth requires from us, or where pride has made apology difficult. We can ask whom we have reduced to a mistake rather than seeing as a child of God and where we may have confused service with the desire for recognition. Questions such as these transform admiration into discipleship.¹⁰²

The objective is not to pretend that we already possess the character we admire but to allow admiration to awaken aspiration. “About Admiration,” another supplementary Thought Adjuster message, suggests that the people and ideals we admire influence what we seek to become. As spiritual values mature, admiration can increasingly turn toward higher ideals, with Jesus presented as the supreme example of a life worthy of such aspiration. What we consistently admire matters because admiration directs desire. If we admire only wealth, appearance, power, fame, and social influence, those values will naturally shape our ambitions. If we increasingly admire courage, wisdom, goodness, mercy, integrity, service, and love, another kind of ambition emerges: the desire for character.¹⁰³

That desire matters because spiritual development requires more than knowing what is good. We must eventually want the good strongly enough to choose it. Jesus’ life helps make goodness attractive. His strength did not require cruelty, his humility did not require weakness, his love did not require foolishness, and his devotion to God did not destroy his individuality. Instead, spiritual maturity made his personality increasingly free to express the highest values of human existence. This is why Jesus remains the living example for the road toward perfection. He shows that the Father’s will can be lived within human experience and that love can coexist with strength, mercy with truth, humility with confidence, service with freedom, and spiritual devotion with fully engaged human life.

We cannot reproduce his unique life, nor are we required to do so. What we can choose is the same fundamental direction. We can seek the Father he sought, learn to trust the Father he trusted, practice the love he revealed, develop the courage to choose truth, cultivate the mercy to forgive, strengthen the discipline needed to master lower reactions, and increase our willingness to serve. We can become more conscious of God within and more aware of the divine possibilities within the people around us. Jesus shows us what the road looks like when devotion to the Father becomes the organizing principle of a human life, and the place where we are expected to begin practicing what his life reveals is not distant from us. Our great spiritual classroom is already here—in our homes, relationships, workplaces, disappointments, responsibilities, conflicts, successes, mistakes, and

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ordinary routines. The road toward perfection passes directly through daily life.¹⁰⁴

Chapter 8 — The Classroom of Daily Life

It is natural to imagine that spiritual growth occurs most powerfully during obviously spiritual moments. Prayer, worship, meditation, study, and periods of deep reflection can certainly contribute to our relationship with God. They help redirect attention toward the Father and remind us of purposes that can easily become obscured by the pressures of material life. Yet if the road toward perfection existed only in such moments, much of human existence would seem spiritually secondary. Most of our days are occupied not by extraordinary religious experiences but by work, family, responsibilities, conversations, decisions, interruptions, difficulties, plans, disappointments, and ordinary routines. If the Father's purpose embraces the whole person, then these experiences must also have a place in our spiritual education.¹⁰⁵

Daily life is one of the great classrooms of the evolutionary creature because it converts ideals into experience. It is relatively easy to admire patience in principle; it is more difficult to practice patience with someone who repeatedly irritates us. Forgiveness appears beautiful until we have something painful to forgive. Courage is admirable until the courageous choice threatens something we value. Service sounds noble until it requires our time, energy, convenience, or resources. Truthfulness is easy to praise until telling the truth carries a personal cost. The values we claim to believe become spiritually significant when circumstances give us the opportunity to choose them.

This is why ordinary life should not be viewed merely as the background against which spiritual development takes place. Much of it is the material from which spiritual development is constructed. The people around us, the responsibilities we carry, the problems we solve, the disappointments we encounter, and the decisions we make repeatedly provide the conditions in which character develops. We may wish for different circumstances, and sometimes changing

circumstances is wise, but spiritual growth does not have to wait until life becomes ideal.

“Where You Stand” emphasizes this point by presenting ordinary human responsibilities as genuine opportunities for experience and growth. The message specifically refers to raising children and providing for a family as examples of experiences through which important lessons can be learned, and it reminds us that Jesus himself passed through a period of family responsibility before beginning his public teaching career. It concludes by directing attention toward the lessons and opportunities already available within routine life. The implication is significant: we may be searching for the place where spiritual growth is supposed to occur while standing in it already.¹⁰⁶

Family life provides one of the clearest examples. Relationships within a family are often close enough and continuous enough to reveal aspects of personality that remain hidden in less intimate settings. It may be easy to appear patient during a brief encounter with a stranger while becoming impatient with the same behavior repeated every day at home. We may speak graciously in public yet become careless with our words around those whose love we take for granted. Familiarity can expose weaknesses, but that exposure can become useful if we are willing to learn from it.

A child may teach a parent patience in ways no book could teach it. A spouse may expose our difficulty listening without immediately defending ourselves. An aging parent may require forms of service we never expected to provide. A sibling may awaken old emotional patterns that reveal how much of the past still influences the present. These relationships are not spiritually valuable because every family interaction is harmonious. Their value often lies precisely in the fact that they present repeated opportunities to choose a better response.

The same is true of friendship. Genuine friendship requires more than enjoying another person’s company. It can require loyalty when circumstances are inconvenient, honesty when truth is uncomfortable, patience when a friend struggles repeatedly, and humility when the friend sees something about us that we would prefer not to see. Friendship can also test our ability to rejoice in another person’s success without turning it into a comparison with our own life.

Through these experiences, love becomes less theoretical and more mature.

Relationships also teach us that love does not mean allowing every behavior. Sometimes the growth opportunity is not greater accommodation but the courage to establish a boundary. There are situations in which continuing to enable destructive behavior is neither loving nor wise. Learning when to help, when to speak, when to wait, when to forgive, and when to create distance requires discernment. The classroom of daily life does not offer only simple lessons. Some of its most important lessons involve holding two values together: mercy and accountability, love and truth, patience and courage, service and self-respect.

Conflict is particularly revealing because it brings competing wills into direct contact. We discover how strongly we need to be right, how quickly we interpret disagreement as disrespect, how easily fear becomes anger, or how readily pride prevents apology. Conflict can therefore become a mirror. The other person may indeed be wrong about something, but that does not mean our own response contains nothing to examine. A disagreement may simultaneously reveal another person's error and our impatience, defensiveness, or desire to humiliate.

Spiritual maturity does not require avoiding all conflict. Some disagreements concern matters important enough to address. What changes is the manner in which conflict is approached. We can learn to distinguish defending truth from defending ego, correction from humiliation, and healthy firmness from retaliation. We can ask whether our objective is resolution, understanding, protection of something valuable, or merely victory. These distinctions become clearer through practice rather than theory alone.

Forgiveness belongs naturally within this classroom because human relationships inevitably include disappointment. Even people who genuinely love one another will sometimes misunderstand, neglect, irritate, or hurt one another. If every offense becomes permanent, relationships gradually accumulate emotional debts that make genuine closeness increasingly difficult. "Inner Freedom" describes forgiveness as a means of release from anger, grudges, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation, applying the principle both to others and to oneself. Forgiveness in this sense becomes not only something we offer another

person but also a way of refusing to let the past indefinitely control the future.¹⁰⁷

This does not mean that forgiveness erases consequences. Trust may need to be rebuilt, and in some situations it may never return to its previous form. Forgiveness does not require placing ourselves repeatedly in harmful circumstances. It means that we gradually surrender the desire to nourish hatred, revenge, or permanent condemnation. The decision may have to be renewed many times before the emotional wound is fully healed. That repeated choice itself can become part of spiritual growth.

Work provides another major classroom. “The Benefits of Work” describes work as an environment in which discipline, responsibility, ethics, perseverance, and service can develop. It encourages the individual to do the best possible work within present circumstances and connects such effort with the gradual manifestation of higher character. This gives dignity to forms of work that may receive little public recognition. Spiritual value is not determined by prestige.¹⁰⁸

A person cleaning a building honestly, caring for patients compassionately, repairing machinery carefully, managing an office responsibly, teaching children patiently, preparing food conscientiously, or performing countless other necessary tasks can develop character through the way the work is done. The task may be ordinary, but qualities such as dependability, honesty, patience, excellence, cooperation, and service are not spiritually insignificant. The individual who learns to practice these qualities is becoming something through the work as well as accomplishing the work itself.

This perspective does not imply that every job is good or that people should remain indefinitely in unhealthy employment. There may be legitimate reasons to leave, seek advancement, change careers, pursue education, or challenge injustice. But even the decision to change circumstances becomes part of the classroom. It may require courage, planning, patience, self-knowledge, financial responsibility, or willingness to begin again. Spiritual growth is not found only in remaining where we are; it can also occur through learning when and how to move.

The same principle applies to success. We often think of difficulty as a spiritual test while overlooking the tests contained in favorable

circumstances. Success can reveal character just as clearly as failure. What happens when we receive recognition, influence, money, authority, or opportunities that others do not possess? Do these things increase gratitude and responsibility, or do they gradually create entitlement? Do we use greater ability to serve more effectively, or do we begin to measure our worth by our advantage over others?

Failure presents a different set of lessons. A failed plan can expose unrealistic expectations, insufficient preparation, misplaced confidence, or factors beyond our control. The spiritual question is not merely whether we succeeded but what we do with what the experience teaches. “Great Opportunities” emphasizes that sincere efforts to do the Father’s will may still include mistakes and disappointments, and it encourages the individual to learn from them rather than concluding that spiritual progress has been destroyed. Evolutionary beings must be allowed to learn because experience is one of the ways evolutionary wisdom develops.¹⁰⁹

Mistakes can therefore become teachers if we refuse both denial and despair. Denial prevents learning because it refuses to acknowledge what happened. Despair also prevents learning because it converts a mistake into a final judgment about the self. Responsibility lies between these extremes. We can say, “I made this choice, and it produced these consequences. What can I understand now that I did not understand before? What should I repair? What should I choose differently next time?” Such questions transform regret into instruction.

This is particularly important when our mistake has harmed another person. Spiritual growth cannot consist merely of privately feeling forgiven while ignoring the consequences of our actions. Where possible and appropriate, responsibility may require apology, restitution, correction, or changed behavior. An apology without change may become another form of avoidance. Genuine repentance should gradually become visible in the quality of subsequent choices.

The classroom of daily life also includes circumstances we did not create and cannot quickly change. Illness, loss, financial difficulty, rejection, loneliness, uncertainty, and other forms of suffering can narrow our apparent choices. We should not pretend that these experiences are easy or automatically beneficial. Pain can overwhelm, and people sometimes need practical help, professional assistance, time,

and the support of others. Spiritual language should never become a way of minimizing real suffering.

Yet even when our control over circumstances is limited, the possibility of spiritual response is not necessarily eliminated. We may still be able to choose honesty instead of denial, seek help instead of withdrawing, accept support instead of allowing pride to isolate us, or refuse to let suffering become cruelty toward others. Sometimes the available choice is very small, but a small choice can still represent genuine movement toward light.

The message “Days” speaks to this fluctuating experience of mortal life. It describes days when purpose seems clear and other days when ordinary responsibilities and worldly measures make life appear inadequate. Yet it points toward the quiet significance of ordinary people continuing to work, care for families, learn, and preserve hope. This is a useful corrective to the idea that spiritual progress should always feel inspiring. Some days faith may be expressed simply by continuing.¹¹⁰

There will be periods when we feel close to God and others when the inner life seems quiet. There will be days when patience comes easily and days when familiar weaknesses reappear. Spiritual maturity learns not to interpret every fluctuation as a final verdict. Feelings provide information, but they are not always reliable measures of spiritual direction. A person can feel discouraged while still choosing courage, feel spiritually dry while still remaining faithful, or feel uncertain while still choosing truth as honestly as it can be recognized.¹¹¹

The ordinary day therefore deserves greater respect than we often give it. We may imagine that a meaningful life consists primarily of memorable events, but character is largely developed between them. A life is made from thousands of mornings, conversations, meals, tasks, interruptions, decisions, and evenings that will never be remembered individually. Their apparent smallness does not make them meaningless. Repetition is one of the ways character is formed.

This can be seen clearly in habits. A single decision to be patient is valuable, but repeated decisions begin to establish patience as a more natural response. A single act of generosity is good, while habitual generosity changes the kind of person who is giving. Repeated honesty

makes truthfulness increasingly integrated into character. Conversely, repeated resentment, dishonesty, selfishness, or avoidance can also become habitual. The classroom is always operating, whether we consciously participate in it or not.

Awareness allows us to participate more intentionally. We can begin asking not only what we need to accomplish today but what kind of person today gives us an opportunity to become. A difficult meeting may become an opportunity for patience. A mistake may become an opportunity for humility. Another person's success may become an opportunity to overcome jealousy. An unexpected interruption may become an opportunity for service. A period of rest may become an opportunity to receive rather than constantly produce.

"The Seasons of Life" helps maintain balance here by describing planning, action, and rest as necessary parts of human experience. It specifically recognizes that rest, worship, and recreation have legitimate places alongside work and action. This prevents the classroom metaphor from becoming an excuse for relentless self-improvement. Students require rest, and evolutionary creatures do as well. We are not expected to analyze every moment anxiously for hidden spiritual lessons.¹¹²

There is a difference between awareness and obsession. Spiritual growth should gradually create greater freedom, not constant fear that every minor decision is a cosmic examination. The Father is not watching for technical errors so that he can declare us failures. The evolutionary process itself assumes incompleteness. We learn because we do not already know everything, and we practice because we have not already mastered everything.

"Practice Brings Perfection" expresses this with unusual tenderness. It acknowledges discouragement over repeated shortcomings while comparing spiritual development to a young child learning to walk. Falling is part of learning, and the appropriate response is to rise and continue. The message encourages the individual not to become excessively stressed by the process but to continue practicing while living more joyfully in the present. This attitude is particularly important in the classroom of daily life because a classroom in which mistakes are forbidden would not be a place of learning.¹¹³

The Father's purpose is not served by our becoming terrified of imperfection. Fear may temporarily control behavior, but love and understanding produce deeper transformation. The objective is to become increasingly capable of recognizing the higher choice and increasingly willing to make it. When we fail, the lesson continues. When we succeed, another lesson eventually appears.

This process also changes the way we understand inconvenience. Many opportunities for spiritual growth arrive disguised as interruptions. Someone needs our attention when we have other plans. A problem requires more patience than expected. A responsibility takes longer than we wanted. Another person's weakness complicates our day. Not every interruption must be accepted, and healthy boundaries remain necessary, but some interruptions reveal whether our plans have become more important than people.

Jesus' life provides an important example. His public work repeatedly placed him among people whose needs did not necessarily conform to an efficient schedule. Yet he also withdrew when necessary and did not respond identically to every demand. The lesson is not that we must always permit interruption but that love and wisdom, rather than mere convenience, should increasingly determine our response.

Planning remains important. "The Seasons of Life" recognizes planning as part of mature human functioning because choices have consequences and responsibilities require preparation. The spiritual person should not become careless under the assumption that faith will compensate for avoidable irresponsibility. We can plan finances, prepare for responsibilities, consider consequences, organize work, and anticipate needs while still recognizing that plans are not absolute.¹¹⁴

Life will sometimes depart from the plan, and our response to that departure becomes another lesson. Rigidity can turn an unexpected change into unnecessary suffering, while flexibility allows us to adapt without abandoning purpose. This ability to preserve values while changing methods is one of the characteristics we observed in Jesus. The goal remains stable even when the route changes.

The classroom also includes periods of waiting. Modern life often encourages immediate results, yet some important developments cannot be rushed. Relationships require time. Character requires repetition. Healing may require patience. Opportunities sometimes require

preparation before they can be used wisely. Prayer itself may lead not to an immediate answer but to a period in which we gradually become capable of understanding the question differently.

Waiting can therefore reveal whether our trust depends entirely upon receiving what we want when we want it. It can expose impatience, fear, or the desire to control outcomes. But waiting can also develop endurance, deepen reflection, and create space for possibilities we would have overlooked while rushing forward. The challenge is to distinguish patient waiting from passive avoidance. Sometimes we are waiting because wisdom requires time; at other times we call it waiting because we are afraid to act.

Discernment develops partly through making these distinctions and then observing the results. We will not always judge correctly. This is why humility must accompany action. We make the best decision we can with the understanding available, remain receptive to correction, and learn from what follows. Such humility allows experience to teach us.

Gradually, daily life itself begins to look different. The same responsibilities remain, but they acquire additional meaning. Work becomes more than earning. Relationships become more than companionship. Conflict becomes more than irritation. Failure becomes more than disappointment. Success becomes more than achievement. Rest becomes more than inactivity. Each can participate in the development of a personality learning to live increasingly in harmony with divine values.

This does not require us to become solemn about every moment. Joy, humor, recreation, creativity, beauty, friendship, and simple pleasure belong to a full human life. The Father's purpose is not served by making existence grim. The ability to enjoy what is good can itself express gratitude. A balanced spiritual life should make us increasingly capable of appreciating truth, beauty, goodness, relationship, and the gift of existence.

The lesson is not that everything must be made explicitly religious. The lesson is that nothing genuinely human needs to be excluded from spiritual growth. Our material life and spiritual destiny are not two unrelated stories. The first stage of the eternal journey is being lived

here, through this human experience, with these limitations, these opportunities, and these people.

We do not need to wait for a different world before beginning to become like the Father. The classroom has already opened. Its lessons arrive through ordinary responsibilities and extraordinary challenges, through success and failure, through action and rest, through the people we love and sometimes through those we find difficult to love. Each day offers opportunities to convert ideals into choices and choices into character.

When we begin to understand life this way, the question changes. Instead of asking when our spiritual life will finally begin, we begin to recognize that it has been unfolding within ordinary life all along. The Father is not merely preparing us for some distant spiritual existence by removing us from human experience. He is teaching us within experience how truth becomes truthfulness, how goodness becomes action, how mercy becomes forgiveness, and how love becomes service.

And among all the lessons daily life provides, one eventually becomes central. If becoming like the Father increasingly changes the way we respond to other people, then love cannot remain simply one virtue among many. It becomes one of the clearest expressions of spiritual maturity. The road toward perfection must therefore lead us next into the meaning of love and the life of service that naturally grows from it.

Chapter 9 — Love and Service

If the journey toward perfection is a journey toward greater Godlikeness, then love cannot remain merely one desirable quality among many. It must eventually become central to the entire process. Truth matters, goodness matters, wisdom matters, courage matters, and self-mastery matters, but each of these qualities reaches a higher expression when it becomes joined with love. Truth without love can become harshness. Courage without love can become domination. Discipline without love can become rigidity. Even service, when separated from love, can become obligation, self-display, or a means of controlling others. The perfection of the Father points toward something more integrated: a character in which increasing spiritual maturity produces an increasing capacity to love.¹¹⁵

This is why Jesus' teaching about perfection cannot be separated from his teaching about the Father's love. The call to become like the Father is not principally an invitation to become flawless observers of rules. It is a call toward the character of a divine Parent whose goodness extends beyond the boundaries human beings commonly establish around those they consider deserving. Jesus elevated love beyond the natural affection we feel for family and friends and directed it toward a broader recognition of human beings as members of one spiritual family.¹¹⁶

Such love is much more demanding than sentiment. It is relatively easy to love people who love us, understand us, agree with us, and make our lives pleasant. The deeper test comes when another person is difficult, disappointing, different, or even hostile. It is there that love begins to reveal whether it is simply an emotional response to favorable treatment or a developing spiritual quality of character.¹¹⁷

The supplementary message "The Power of Connection" emphasizes this broader dimension of love by encouraging loving intention even toward enemies and by presenting connection with the

divine Source as a means through which the individual becomes increasingly Godlike. It describes love as a transformative power capable of changing both the individual and the relationships in which that individual participates. The significance of this teaching is not that affection can be forced. We cannot command ourselves to feel emotionally close to everyone. The deeper possibility is that goodwill can be chosen even where affection is absent.¹¹⁸

This distinction between love and affection is essential. Affection is a natural and valuable human emotion, but spiritual love extends farther. We may not enjoy another person's company and can still desire that person's genuine good. We may strongly disagree with someone and still refuse to dehumanize them. We may establish a necessary boundary and still decline to nourish hatred. We may hold someone accountable while remembering that the person remains more than the worst decision he or she has made.

Such love does not require blindness. Becoming more loving should not make us less capable of recognizing harmful behavior. A parent who loves a child does not therefore approve everything the child does. In fact, love sometimes requires correction precisely because the person matters. Similarly, loving another adult does not require surrendering judgment, tolerating abuse, or pretending that injustice is acceptable. The spiritual challenge is to oppose what is wrong without allowing opposition to transform us into what we oppose.

This is particularly difficult when we have been injured. Pain naturally narrows attention toward the wrong that was done and the person who caused it. Depending upon the severity of the injury, healing may take considerable time. Forgiveness should therefore not be reduced to a superficial declaration that everything is fine. Some wounds require emotional processing, changed circumstances, restored boundaries, or long periods of recovery. Yet the spiritual direction remains important: we seek eventually to become free from the desire to preserve hatred as part of our identity.

"Inner Freedom" describes forgiveness in precisely this liberating sense. It associates forgiveness of others and oneself with release from anger, grudges, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation. Forgiveness therefore does something not only for the person forgiven but also for the person forgiving. Resentment keeps the injury active within the

inner life. The event may have occurred years ago, but continued rehearsal allows it to occupy the present.¹¹⁹

Forgiveness does not rewrite history. It changes our relationship with history. We may still remember what happened, retain appropriate boundaries, and recognize that trust was damaged. What gradually changes is the authority we give the injury over the person we are becoming. We decide that another person's wrongdoing will not be allowed to determine indefinitely the quality of our inner life.

The same principle applies to self-forgiveness. People seeking spiritual growth sometimes become extraordinarily harsh toward themselves. They remember mistakes long after they would have forgiven another person for similar failures. Yet endless self-condemnation does not necessarily produce holiness. It can become another form of self-absorption in which attention remains fixed on personal failure rather than on learning, restitution, and future growth.

Healthy remorse acknowledges reality. If we have harmed someone, we should not pretend otherwise. We may need to apologize, repair what can be repaired, accept consequences, and change behavior. But once a mistake has been honestly faced, continuing to punish ourselves forever adds no goodness to the universe. The better response is to allow the failure to teach us and then use our freedom differently.

Love therefore includes mercy, and mercy is closely related to the evolutionary nature of human beings. If everyone were already complete, patience and forgiveness would have far less work to do. But we live among unfinished people while being unfinished ourselves. We will misunderstand one another, fail to communicate, react from fear, make poor judgments, and sometimes cause harm. A community of evolutionary beings cannot endure without some capacity for mercy.

This recognition should produce humility. The weakness we condemn in another person may not be our weakness, but we have weaknesses of our own. The fact that one particular temptation does not trouble us does not make us spiritually superior to someone who struggles with it. We may be strong where another is weak and weak where another is strong. Recognizing this should not lead us to excuse destructive behavior, but it should make us more careful about contempt.

Contempt is especially dangerous because it allows us to stop seeing the other person as fully human. Once contempt takes control, cruelty becomes easier to justify. We begin believing that because someone is wrong about something, everything about the person may be dismissed. The Father's perspective must be larger. The divine Parent sees the whole evolutionary child: present reality, past experience, motive, ignorance, struggle, possibility, and future potential.

Learning to love as the Father loves therefore requires learning to see more completely. We may never possess divine comprehension, but we can resist the tendency to reduce people to categories. A person is not merely an occupation, political opinion, social status, failure, achievement, illness, nationality, reputation, or mistake. These may describe something about a human life, but none describes the whole personality known by God.

The supplementary message "Effort and Struggle" connects the journey toward the image of God with loving service, tolerance, forgiveness, and acceptance of others as brothers and sisters traveling the same path. This image of fellow travelers is useful because it changes the way we interpret differences in spiritual development. Travelers can be at different places on the road without belonging to different human families.¹²⁰

Someone may be farther ahead in one area and behind in another. The appropriate response is not superiority but service. If we possess knowledge another person lacks, perhaps the knowledge creates an opportunity to teach. If we have resources another lacks, perhaps resources create an opportunity to help. If we have learned forgiveness through painful experience, perhaps our experience allows us to accompany someone who is only beginning that struggle. Growth becomes spiritually fruitful when what we have gained can contribute to the growth of others.

This brings us from love to service. Genuine love naturally seeks expression. If we say we care about another person but consistently remain indifferent to needs we could reasonably address, our love remains incomplete. Service converts goodwill into action. It is one of the ways inward spiritual values become visible in the world.

Service need not be dramatic. Much of the most meaningful service in human life is almost invisible. Parents perform thousands of acts

their children may never remember. Friends listen to conversations no one else will hear. Workers solve problems that prevent difficulties for people they may never meet. Neighbors help one another. Someone prepares a meal, makes a phone call, offers transportation, explains something confusing, stays with a person who is grieving, or simply gives another human being undivided attention for a few minutes.

“The Benefits of Work” expands the concept of service by emphasizing that useful work contributes to the larger functioning of society even when the task appears humble. It encourages the individual to perform work with the highest intention and to recognize that sincere effort can benefit others while helping the worker develop discipline, responsibility, and character. This means service should not be confined to activities formally labeled charitable or religious. Honest work can be service.¹²¹

The spiritual value of service also depends partly upon motive. We can serve because we genuinely want to help, but we can also serve because we want admiration, control, gratitude, or a sense of superiority. Human motives are often mixed, and we should not become paralyzed by demanding perfect motives before doing anything good. Nevertheless, growth includes increasing honesty about why we do what we do.

Sometimes we discover that our disappointment after helping someone comes not from the failure of the help but from the absence of recognition. We expected gratitude. We wanted the other person to acknowledge our sacrifice. When that acknowledgment does not come, resentment appears. Such moments can become valuable instruction because they reveal that part of our service was directed toward ourselves.

This does not mean gratitude is unimportant. Gratitude strengthens relationships and should be cultivated. But the highest form of service becomes increasingly free from dependence upon praise. We learn to do good because good is worth doing. The Father’s love does not depend upon applause from his children, and growing Godlikeness should gradually make our goodness less dependent upon recognition.

Service also requires wisdom because helping is not always the same as giving another person what he or she requests. There are situations in which immediate assistance is appropriate and others in which

assistance can unintentionally strengthen irresponsibility. A parent who performs every task for a capable child may prevent the child from developing. A friend who repeatedly protects another person from every consequence may help preserve the very pattern causing the problem. Love asks not only, "How can I reduce discomfort?" but also, "What genuinely contributes to this person's good?"¹²²

This is why fatherly love is such an important concept. Mature parental love combines affection with wisdom about growth. It recognizes that children need both support and opportunities to develop responsibility. Jesus' presentation of the Father directs us toward a love that seeks the highest welfare of the person rather than simply immediate satisfaction.

Such love requires discernment. Sometimes service means giving. Sometimes it means teaching. Sometimes it means listening. Sometimes it means telling an uncomfortable truth. Sometimes it means allowing another person to solve a problem without taking it over. Sometimes it means protecting someone who cannot protect himself or herself, and sometimes it means stepping aside so another person can discover personal strength.

No universal formula can determine the correct expression of love in every circumstance. This is why spiritual maturity involves more than good intentions. Wisdom must grow alongside compassion. The person seeking the Father's will learns to ask not merely whether an action feels kind but whether it is genuinely constructive.

Love also changes how we listen. Much human conversation is not really listening but waiting for an opportunity to speak. We prepare our reply while the other person is still talking. We interpret what is said through assumptions we have already formed. Sometimes we listen only for evidence supporting what we already believe. Genuine attention can therefore become a form of service.

To listen well is to make room temporarily for another person's experience. It does not require agreement. It requires enough humility to recognize that we may not yet understand everything. Listening can reveal pain hidden beneath anger, fear hidden beneath control, or confusion hidden beneath certainty. It can also reveal that our own interpretation was incomplete.

This does not mean that every conversation will end in agreement. Some differences are real and may remain. Love does not require pretending otherwise. But disagreement conducted with respect protects the humanity of everyone involved. We can challenge an idea without treating the person as worthless. We can defend conviction without turning conviction into permission for cruelty.

This becomes especially important in societies marked by division. Groups easily teach their members to interpret outsiders in simplified ways. Once people become categories rather than persons, suspicion and hostility can spread rapidly. The spiritual recognition of universal family challenges this tendency. If God is Father, then the person we oppose remains, at the deepest level, another member of the same human family.

“The Power of Connection” presents this interconnectedness as fundamental and encourages loving intention as a means of contributing to change. Whether we think of this connection cosmologically, spiritually, or practically, the principle is clear: our treatment of other people contributes to the kind of world in which everyone must live.¹²³

A single act of kindness will not solve every social problem, but neither is it insignificant. Human environments are created partly through accumulated behavior. Patience influences families. Honesty influences workplaces. Mercy influences communities. Courage can interrupt injustice. Service can restore hope. One person’s decision can give another person the strength to make a better decision in turn.

This is another way in which the river metaphor becomes useful. “The River” describes choices aligned with truth, beauty, goodness, and love as receiving momentum within the larger movement toward perfection and as contributing something beneficial to others traveling within that movement. Love is therefore both personal and social. It changes the individual who chooses it and alters, however slightly, the environment in which others are choosing.¹²⁴

Service also protects spirituality from becoming excessively inward. Prayer, reflection, study, and stillness are important, but if they continually make us more occupied with ourselves while leaving us less compassionate toward others, something has become unbalanced.

Relationship with God should eventually increase our capacity for relationship with God's children.

This does not mean that the contemplative life has no value. Stillness can deepen service because it helps purify motive, restore perspective, and renew spiritual strength. "The Power of Connection" connects stillness and relationship with the divine Source with learning divine love and becoming increasingly Godlike. The inward and outward movements of spiritual life therefore support one another. We turn inward toward God and return outward with greater capacity to love.¹²⁵

The same balance applies to self-love. The command to love others does not require hatred of oneself. "Where You Stand" describes sincere and unconditional love for others alongside recognition of personal value and self-love. This matters because people who believe they have no value may confuse self-neglect with spirituality. Yet if we are also children of the Father, our own well-being cannot be entirely excluded from the circle of love.¹²⁶

Healthy self-love is not selfishness. Selfishness treats the self as though only the self matters. Healthy self-love recognizes that the self matters too. It allows us to care for physical health, seek needed rest, establish boundaries, develop abilities, forgive our own evolutionary shortcomings, and accept help when help is needed. These practices can make sustained service more possible rather than less.

There are times when receiving is itself an act of humility. A person accustomed to helping others may find it difficult to allow someone else to help. Receiving can feel like weakness or loss of control. Yet human interdependence means that everyone will sometimes be the giver and sometimes the recipient. Allowing another person to serve can also provide that person an opportunity to express love.

Love therefore moves in many directions. It reaches toward God, toward other people, and toward the self as a child of God. These expressions should not compete but gradually become integrated. Love of God should deepen love of people. Love of people should teach us more about the Father. Healthy self-respect should free us to serve without needing to prove our worth.

The perfection mandate becomes far more understandable when viewed through this lens. To become like the Father is to become

increasingly capable of loving as the Father loves. We will not possess infinite divine love during mortal life, but we can participate in its direction. We can become less selfish, less vindictive, less judgmental, and less dependent upon receiving something in return. We can become more patient, merciful, truthful, generous, understanding, and willing to serve.

This growth occurs through choices, and therefore love must be practiced. We should not wait until every loving action feels natural. Sometimes the choice precedes the feeling. We may choose to listen while still irritated, choose not to retaliate while still angry, choose to help while tired, choose to forgive while still wounded, or choose to speak kindly while not feeling particularly affectionate. Repeated choices gradually educate the emotional life as well as the will.

There will be failures. We will sometimes discover that our supposed love contained more selfishness than we realized. We will lose patience, misunderstand motives, speak too quickly, help unwisely, or fail to recognize a need until the opportunity has passed. These failures do not invalidate the goal. They become part of the continuing education of love.

The question is whether we remain teachable. Can we recognize when our service became controlling? Can we apologize when our truthfulness became unnecessarily harsh? Can we notice when our desire to help was actually a desire to be needed? Can we learn to love more intelligently next time? The willingness to ask these questions is itself part of growth.

Eventually, love begins to move from isolated action toward character. At first, we may have to remind ourselves to be patient. Later, patience appears more readily. At first, forgiveness may require tremendous effort. Later, resentment becomes less attractive. At first, service may feel like sacrifice. Later, contributing to another person's good can become a source of genuine joy.

This does not mean that love ever becomes effortless in every circumstance. New situations reveal new levels of growth still required. But the general orientation of the personality changes. The person increasingly asks what can be given rather than only what can be received, what can be understood rather than only what can be judged, and what can be healed rather than only who can be blamed.

Such a person is beginning to reveal something of the Father.

The journey toward perfection is therefore not measured only by how much spiritual knowledge we acquire or how deeply we can discuss divine realities. Knowledge can guide us, but love demonstrates whether spiritual values are becoming character. The person who knows less theology but has become more patient, forgiving, honest, merciful, and helpful may be expressing more of the Father's character than someone who can explain profound spiritual concepts while remaining unkind.

The ultimate purpose is not merely to understand perfection. It is to become increasingly perfect in the way available to an evolutionary child of God, and one of the clearest signs of that growth is the widening capacity to love.

Love gives direction to freedom. Love gives purpose to service. Love softens strength without weakening it, joins mercy with truth, and turns spiritual aspiration outward toward the good of others. Through love, the desire to become like God begins to become visible in human relationships.

Yet knowing that love should guide us does not mean we will always succeed in practicing it. Old reactions remain, habits persist, and the gap between what we understand and what we consistently live can be discouraging. The next part of the journey therefore requires patience with the process itself. Spiritual character is developed through practice, correction, perseverance, and the willingness to begin again. The road toward perfection does not require that we never fall. It requires that we continue learning how to rise.

Chapter 10 — Practice Brings Perfection

Once we understand perfection as an evolutionary goal rather than an immediate condition, practice becomes unavoidable. No human being learns patience simply by agreeing that patience is good. We do not master forgiveness by understanding its definition, become courageous by admiring courage, or develop self-control merely by deciding that self-control would be useful. Spiritual values must pass from understanding into experience, and experience requires repeated opportunities to choose. The road toward perfection is therefore not traveled through aspiration alone. It is traveled through aspiration expressed repeatedly in decisions, actions, corrections, and renewed effort.

This may seem obvious, yet it has profound implications for the way we evaluate spiritual progress. Many people become discouraged because they expect understanding to produce immediate transformation. Once they recognize a weakness, they assume they should be able to eliminate it quickly. When the weakness appears again, they interpret its return as evidence that nothing has changed. But recognition and mastery are not the same stage of development. In fact, becoming more aware of a weakness may itself represent progress because we cannot consciously transform what we do not yet recognize.

A person may have reacted impatiently for years without giving the pattern much thought. Then spiritual growth increases self-awareness, and suddenly the impatience becomes difficult to ignore. The person may initially feel worse because the weakness now appears more visible than before. Yet the weakness may not actually have increased. Awareness has increased. What was previously automatic has entered consciousness, and consciousness creates the possibility of choice.

This is one reason the journey toward perfection can sometimes feel more difficult as we progress. Greater light reveals more, including things within ourselves that we would rather not see. We begin noticing

motives that were previously hidden, reactions we once justified, resentments we considered reasonable, and habits we assumed were simply part of our personality. This discovery should not automatically be interpreted as spiritual decline. Sometimes seeing the problem clearly is the beginning of genuine change.

The supplementary message “Practice Brings Perfection” addresses this experience directly. It acknowledges that increasing sincerity and spiritual aspiration can be accompanied by greater awareness of shortcomings and failures. It compares the process with a young child learning to walk, falling repeatedly while developing the ability that will eventually become natural. The child is not condemned for falling. Each attempt contributes to learning, and encouragement accompanies the effort to rise again. This is a much healthier model of evolutionary perfection than the expectation that sincere spiritual commitment should immediately eliminate every weakness.¹²⁷

A child learning to walk does not conclude after the third fall that walking must not be part of his destiny. Neither do loving parents interpret the fall as proof that the child is incapable of walking. They recognize something the child cannot yet understand: falling belongs to the process by which stability is acquired. The failure is real, but it is not final. It reveals what has not yet been mastered while simultaneously contributing to mastery.

The same principle applies to character. We may sincerely decide to become more patient and still lose patience. We may decide to forgive and discover that resentment returns the following morning. We may commit ourselves to greater trust in God and then encounter circumstances that awaken fear. We may resolve to speak more carefully and later regret something said in irritation. None of this means the original decision was false. It means a decision has begun a process that must be strengthened through experience.

This distinction protects us from perfectionism. Perfectionism demands evidence of completion before completion is possible. It often speaks in absolutes: if I were truly spiritual, I would never react this way; if I genuinely trusted God, I would never be afraid; if I had really forgiven, I would never feel hurt again; if I were progressing, I would not still struggle with this weakness. Such conclusions confuse direction with arrival.

Perfectionism can even disguise itself as spiritual seriousness. It appears to demand excellence, but beneath that demand there is often fear: fear of failure, fear of inadequacy, fear of disappointing God, fear of discovering that we are not the person we hoped ourselves to be. When spirituality becomes governed by this fear, every mistake threatens identity. Instead of asking what the mistake can teach us, we ask what the mistake proves about us.

The evolutionary view offers another possibility. A mistake proves first that we remain unfinished. That is not surprising. We already knew we were evolutionary creatures. The more useful questions concern what happened, why it happened, what can be learned, what needs to be repaired, and what we will choose when a similar situation arises again. These questions direct attention toward growth rather than condemnation.

This does not minimize responsibility. The fact that mistakes are part of learning does not make every mistake harmless. Our choices can hurt other people and ourselves. Some consequences cannot be completely reversed. Spiritual maturity therefore requires more than saying, "I am still learning." Learning becomes meaningful when experience changes future behavior. Otherwise, the language of growth can become an excuse for avoiding responsibility.

When we recognize that we have done something wrong, the first requirement is honesty. We must resist the temptation to distort the story in order to protect our self-image. Perhaps we acted selfishly. Perhaps pride prevented us from listening. Perhaps fear made us dishonest. Perhaps we were unnecessarily harsh. Perhaps we ignored something we knew we should address. Honest recognition may be uncomfortable, but it creates the foundation for correction.

Where another person has been harmed, honesty may need to become apology. An apology is one of the practical forms humility takes. It acknowledges that our desire to see ourselves as right is less important than truth. Yet even apology can become superficial if it is used only to relieve guilt. The deeper question is whether we are willing to learn enough from the experience that our future behavior begins to change.

Change often requires more than a single resolution because habits possess momentum. A reaction practiced hundreds of times has

become easier to perform than an unfamiliar alternative. The first attempts at a new response may therefore feel awkward and deliberate. We have to stop ourselves, remember what we intended, and choose differently. With repetition, however, the new response can become increasingly natural.

This is how practice contributes to character. At first, patience may be something we consciously perform. Eventually, patient responses become more readily available. At first, we may have to restrain the impulse to retaliate. Later, retaliation itself may become less attractive. At first, generosity may require deliberate sacrifice. Later, giving can become one of the spontaneous expressions of who we are becoming. Practice does not merely change isolated actions; over time it changes the person from whom those actions arise.

“The Road to Perfection” emphasizes this progressive character of spiritual development. It directs attention toward self-discipline in relation to impatience, jealousy, fear, anger, resentment, unforgiveness, and other reactions that obstruct the freer expression of love, joy, compassion, and patience. It presents the process as movement occurring step by tiny step while the individual learns to live more closely with the divine presence within. The phrase “step by tiny step” is particularly appropriate because much genuine growth occurs through changes too small to impress anyone watching from the outside.¹²⁸

We often prefer dramatic transformation because dramatic change is easier to recognize. Yet character may be changing when a person becomes irritated five times instead of ten, recognizes resentment after an hour instead of after several days, apologizes sooner than before, or pauses briefly before reacting. None of these developments represents completion, but each may represent movement.¹²⁹

This requires learning how to recognize progress without becoming complacent. If we look only at how far we remain from the Father’s perfection, we may become discouraged. If we look only at how far we have already come, we may become satisfied too easily. Wisdom holds both realities together. We can be grateful for growth while remaining open to further transformation.

Humility makes this possible because humility does not require either self-condemnation or self-congratulation. It allows us to see

ourselves more accurately. We can acknowledge improvement without pretending to have arrived, and we can acknowledge weakness without concluding that weakness defines the whole person. We are neither complete failures nor completed saints. We are evolutionary children engaged in a long education.

Self-mastery is an important part of this education. The term can sound severe if interpreted as suppression of everything human, but genuine self-mastery is better understood as increasing freedom. A person controlled by every impulse is not fully free. If anger automatically determines speech, appetite automatically determines consumption, fear automatically determines decisions, or the need for approval automatically determines behavior, freedom has been narrowed by reaction.

Self-mastery creates space between impulse and choice. The emotion may still arise, but it no longer possesses unquestioned authority. We can experience anger without automatically speaking cruelly. We can feel fear without automatically retreating from what is right. We can desire something without assuming that desire must be satisfied. We can feel offended without immediately retaliating. Each such moment represents a small enlargement of freedom.

This is why discipline and freedom are not necessarily opposites. Wise discipline can increase freedom by weakening patterns that previously controlled us. The musician practices scales in order to become freer in music. The athlete repeats movements until the body can perform them more effectively. In the same way, spiritual practice can gradually make higher responses more accessible.

The practice is not mechanical because spiritual character involves meaning, motive, and choice. We are not merely training behavior. We are learning to understand why certain responses reflect higher values and gradually choosing them because we recognize their goodness. The objective is not simply to appear patient but to become more patient, not merely to perform kindness but to become kinder.

This is where cooperation with the Thought Adjuster becomes especially significant within the framework we have been developing. Human effort alone is not the entire story, yet divine presence does not eliminate human effort. The Father within continually draws the personality toward higher possibilities, while the human will must

decide whether those possibilities will be chosen and expressed. Spiritual development is therefore neither self-salvation through willpower nor passive waiting for God to transform us without our participation. It is cooperation.¹³⁰

“Augment the Quality of Your Decisions” describes this cooperation as increasing attunement between human will and divine leading. It connects the recognition of truth, beauty, and goodness with decisions that contribute to the evolving soul and with the gradual development of the fruits of the spirit. The quality of our choices matters because each decision can strengthen or weaken the direction we have chosen.¹³¹

This also explains why small choices deserve attention. We tend to imagine destiny as determined by a few dramatic decisions, and certainly some choices change the course of life. But the person capable of making a great decision has often been prepared by many smaller ones. Courage practiced in ordinary circumstances becomes available when greater courage is required. Honesty in small matters strengthens the character needed when truth becomes costly. Daily acts of self-control prepare the will for more demanding tests.

Practice therefore prepares us for circumstances we cannot predict. We do not know every challenge that will appear during mortal life, much less throughout the ascending career. What we can develop is character increasingly capable of meeting new circumstances with truth, courage, faith, wisdom, and love.

There will nevertheless be times when progress appears painfully slow. Some patterns are deeply rooted. A person may understand intellectually what should change and still find that emotional reactions continue. Childhood experiences, long-standing fears, habits of thought, and years of repeated behavior do not always disappear quickly. Patience with the process does not mean passivity, but it does mean accepting that genuine transformation sometimes requires time.

“Effort and Struggle” presents faith itself as something that develops through sincere daily practice rather than through coercion. It connects the response to the divine call with the gradual development of loving service, tolerance, forgiveness, and acceptance. Struggle, from this perspective, is not automatically evidence that faith is weak. Sometimes struggle is precisely where faith is becoming stronger.¹³²

This distinction matters because we can easily compare our inner struggle with another person's outward appearance. Someone else may seem peaceful, disciplined, confident, or spiritually mature while we remain painfully aware of our own internal conflict. Yet we do not know the whole history behind another person's character. What appears effortless today may have required years of struggle.

Comparison therefore adds little value to spiritual practice. The relevant question is not whether we have reached another person's stage of development but whether we are responding faithfully to the opportunities presently available to us. We can learn from admirable people without turning admiration into self-condemnation.

Jesus remains the supreme example, but even here imitation must be understood properly. As we have already seen, "Great Freedom" encourages study of the Master without attempting mechanical reproduction of his outward life. We practice the qualities his life reveals within our own circumstances. We ask what his trust in the Father teaches our fear, what his mercy teaches our resentment, what his courage teaches our avoidance, and what his service teaches our self-centeredness.¹³³

There is another important aspect of practice that can easily be overlooked: the management of thought. Actions do not emerge from nowhere. Repeated patterns of thought help prepare emotional and behavioral responses. If we continually rehearse resentment, resentment becomes more available. If we repeatedly imagine humiliation and revenge, those patterns become increasingly familiar. If we constantly interpret other people's motives in the worst possible way, suspicion becomes habitual.

"The Worlds on the Road to Perfection" emphasizes the continuing importance of thought and character development, presenting mortal life as the beginning of a process that continues beyond death rather than ending in instant perfection. This gives our mental habits greater significance. We are not simply passing time until a future spiritual existence automatically corrects everything. We are already participating in the formation of the personality that continues the journey.¹³⁴

The goal is not to police every passing thought with anxiety. Minds produce spontaneous associations, memories, fears, and impulses that may not represent deliberate choice. The more important question is

what we choose to entertain, strengthen, and act upon. A resentful thought may appear without invitation; we then decide whether to feed it. Fear may arise automatically; we decide whether fear will have the final word.

Learning to redirect thought is itself a practice. We can replace endless rehearsal of an offense with an effort to understand, forgive, or focus attention elsewhere. We can challenge assumptions rather than automatically believing them. We can deliberately remember what is true when fear exaggerates what might happen. We can seek beauty and goodness rather than allowing the mind to become continuously occupied with what is ugly and wrong.

This does not mean denying reality. Spiritual positivity should never become refusal to acknowledge suffering, injustice, or danger. Truth must remain the foundation. But truth includes more than what is wrong. A world containing cruelty also contains courage. A life containing loss also contains love. A person containing weakness also contains potential. Spiritual maturity develops the ability to see darkness without concluding that darkness is all that exists.

Hope is therefore another form of practice. Hope does not require certainty about every outcome. It is the refusal to assume that present incompleteness is the final reality. “Days” compares the inner spiritual life to a flame that can appear at times like glowing embers and at other times like a stronger fire, with hope helping to sustain the movement toward the unseen destination. This image is valuable during periods when progress cannot easily be felt.¹³⁵

There will be days when the best spiritual practice is simply to continue. We may not experience inspiration, insight, or unusual closeness to God. We may simply perform responsibilities, try to treat people decently, resist a familiar negative reaction, and turn inward briefly toward the Father. Such a day may appear spiritually ordinary, yet faithfulness in ordinary days contributes to the character that will be present during extraordinary ones.¹³⁶

Rest also belongs to practice. A person who treats spiritual growth as continuous self-correction can become exhausted and excessively self-focused. “Practice Brings Perfection” explicitly counsels against unnecessary stress and encourages a more joyful presence within the

process. The Father's command to become perfect should enlarge life, not reduce it to endless inspection of personal defects.¹³⁷

There is a time to examine ourselves and a time to stop examining ourselves and live. There is a time to correct and a time to enjoy what is good. There is a time to work and a time to rest. There is a time to speak with God about our shortcomings and a time simply to be grateful for divine companionship.

This balance protects spiritual development from becoming another form of obsession. The goal is not to spend every hour asking whether we are progressing quickly enough. The goal is to live increasingly in harmony with the Father. Sometimes that harmony expresses itself through deliberate effort; sometimes through service; sometimes through worship; sometimes through laughter, friendship, creativity, appreciation of beauty, or peaceful rest.

Forgiveness of ourselves becomes particularly important here. "Inner Freedom" encourages the release of regret and self-devaluation through forgiveness while still recognizing personal responsibility. We cannot practice effectively while continuously carrying every previous failure as proof against our future. At some point, the lesson must be retained while the condemnation is released.¹³⁸

The Father knows that we are evolutionary beings. God does not discover our incompleteness when we make a mistake. The entire ascension plan presupposes incompleteness. If we were already what eternity intends us to become, there would be no journey. Divine patience therefore provides the atmosphere within which genuine growth can occur.

We should learn something from that patience. If the Father can work with an unfinished creature across the long ages of ascent, perhaps we can become more patient with ourselves without becoming complacent. We can also become more patient with other people, recognizing that they too are somewhere within an unfinished story.

This does not remove urgency from moral decisions. What we choose today matters precisely because today contributes to that story. Eternity is not an excuse for postponing growth. The existence of a long journey should make us patient about completion while remaining serious about direction.

The mandate is given now. The decision can be made now. The transformation begins now. But the achievement of perfection is the work of the ages.

This distinction brings freedom to the spiritual life. We do not need to become perfect before taking the next step. We take the next step because that is how perfection is approached. We do not need to eliminate every weakness before serving others. Service itself may help us grow beyond selfishness. We do not need perfect faith before turning toward God. Faith grows through turning toward God.

Every sincere attempt matters because practice converts possibility into experience. The impatient person who practices patience is becoming more patient. The fearful person who repeatedly chooses courage is becoming more courageous. The resentful person who practices forgiveness is becoming freer. The selfish person who learns to serve is becoming more loving. None has arrived, but each is moving.

Over time, the accumulated movement becomes character. Choices once difficult become more natural. Values once admired from a distance become qualities increasingly expressed from within. The personality becomes more integrated around truth, beauty, goodness, love, and the Father's will. What began as aspiration becomes experience, and experience becomes part of the evolving soul.

This is why practice brings perfection. Not because repetition magically makes us flawless, but because repeated free-will cooperation with divine leading gradually transforms potential into character. We fall, learn, rise, choose again, forgive, repair, serve, rest, and continue. Each sincere return to the higher direction strengthens the road beneath our feet.¹³⁹

The Father's perfection remains ahead of us as the destination of the ages, but the road is not empty space between ourselves and God. Every genuine step already contains something of the destination. Every choice for truth participates in divine truth. Every act of goodness participates in divine goodness. Every sincere expression of love participates in the love of the Father.

We are therefore not waiting for eternity to begin becoming perfect. Eternity has already begun its work within the choices of today. Our task is not to demand completion from ourselves before its time but to

remain faithful to the process through which completion becomes possible. We practice what we understand, learn from what we fail to understand, accept correction, forgive ourselves and others, and continue toward the Father.

As this practice matures, another discovery becomes increasingly important. The journey toward perfection cannot be lived only in memory of yesterday's failures or anticipation of tomorrow's attainment. Every decision, every act of love, every moment of communion with God, and every opportunity for growth occurs in the present. The eternal destination may lie before us, but the only place from which we can take the next step is here. The journey toward perfection therefore calls us not only to perseverance but also to presence.

Chapter 11 — Perfection in the Present Moment

The journey toward perfection stretches far beyond the boundaries of mortal life. We have already seen that the Father's mandate does not require an evolutionary human being to achieve absolute perfection during a brief earthly existence. The destination is immense, and the journey continues through experiences we cannot yet fully comprehend. Yet there is a paradox at the heart of this long ascent: although perfection lies ahead, every step toward it must be taken now. We cannot choose yesterday, and we cannot act tomorrow before tomorrow arrives. The only point at which the human will actually encounters the opportunity for growth is the present moment.

This gives the present a spiritual importance that is easily overlooked. Human beings spend considerable portions of life mentally somewhere else. We revisit the past, imagining what should have happened, what we should have said, or what another person should have done. We project ourselves into the future, anticipating problems, planning achievements, fearing possibilities, or imagining a time when circumstances will finally allow us to be at peace. Memory and anticipation are necessary human capacities, but when they dominate consciousness they can make the life actually being lived seem secondary.

The past has value because it contains experience. We should learn from it, remember what is worth remembering, make amends where possible, and allow previous choices to educate present judgment. But we cannot return to the past and make a different decision inside it. The future also has value because intelligent people anticipate consequences, establish goals, prepare for responsibilities, and hope for better things. Yet the future remains a field of possibility until it becomes present. The power of choice always operates now.

This means that the perfection mandate, however eternal its destination, is always translated into a present decision. We may intend to become more patient someday, but patience can be practiced only when an actual circumstance requires it. We may hope to become more loving, but love becomes real when another person stands before us in need of understanding, mercy, truth, or service. We may desire a stronger relationship with the Father, but that relationship deepens through moments in which we actually turn toward God. Spiritual aspiration concerns the future, but spiritual living occurs in the present.

The supplementary message “Natural Happiness” places particular emphasis on this relationship between the present moment and genuine happiness. It describes happiness as something that is discovered inwardly rather than secured by conformity to external standards and warns against allowing comparison and socially imposed ideals to define whether life is sufficient. It also connects the search for genuine fulfillment with the pursuit of truth, beauty, goodness, and an increasingly accurate understanding of God. This perspective is especially relevant to the journey toward perfection because perfectionism often persuades us that happiness must be postponed until we have become something we are not yet.¹⁴⁰

We tell ourselves that peace will come after we solve the problem, achieve the goal, eliminate the weakness, obtain the recognition, improve the relationship, earn enough money, change the job, complete the project, or finally become the person we think we should already be. Some of these goals may be entirely worthwhile, but if happiness is always attached to the next condition, life becomes a sequence of waiting rooms. Each achievement produces another requirement, and the present is continually sacrificed to an imagined future.

The pursuit of perfection can become distorted in exactly this way. Instead of inspiring growth, it can convince us that the person we are today is merely an inadequate preliminary version of the person who will someday deserve peace. Yet evolutionary growth requires a different relationship with the present self. We should neither pretend that we are complete nor despise ourselves because we are incomplete. We can recognize what needs to grow while also recognizing that the present stage of the journey has value.

A child does not need to become an adult before childhood can be meaningful. Childhood possesses its own experiences, relationships, discoveries, joys, and developmental tasks. In the same way, the fact that we have not reached the destiny of the ages does not make our present existence spiritually disposable. This life is not merely something to get through before the real journey begins. It is already part of the journey.

The message “Days” captures something of this tension. It describes days when everything seems sufficient and the invisible destination can be approached with confidence, as well as other days when worldly measures cause ordinary human roles to appear inadequate. Yet it draws attention to people continuing to work, care for families, learn, hope, and carry the inner spark of spiritual possibility through seemingly ordinary lives. The lesson is not that ambition is wrong but that significance should not be confused with visibility.¹⁴¹

Many spiritually important moments will never appear important while they are happening. A parent listening patiently to a child, a worker choosing honesty when dishonesty would be easier, a person deciding not to repeat an angry remark, a friend making time for someone who is grieving, or an individual quietly turning toward the Father during a difficult day may leave no public record. Yet these moments can contribute directly to character.

The present moment is where intention becomes action. Before the moment arrives, patience is an ideal. After the moment passes, patience is either an experience we practiced or an opportunity from which we may learn. The living point of transformation lies between those two states, in the moment of choice.

This should not make us anxious about every passing second. Presence is not hypervigilance. We do not need to monitor ourselves continuously as though one imperfect thought could ruin our eternal progress. Such anxiety would simply turn the present into another form of perfectionism. Presence means becoming sufficiently awake to life that we can participate in it rather than continually escaping into regret, fantasy, fear, or distraction.

Awareness begins with noticing. We notice what is happening around us and within us. We recognize that irritation is rising before it becomes an angry response. We notice that another person is trying to

speak while we are preparing our defense. We become aware that fear is exaggerating a future possibility. We recognize that we are physically exhausted and therefore more reactive than usual. We notice beauty we would normally pass without seeing. Awareness does not automatically solve these situations, but it makes conscious choice more possible.

“The Road to Perfection” emphasizes awareness of thoughts, speech, and actions as part of sincere spiritual living and connects increasing self-discipline with the gradual development of love, joy, compassion, and patience. It repeatedly presents progress as movement occurring step by step in relationship with the divine presence within. Awareness is therefore not merely psychological observation. It can become part of our cooperation with God.¹⁴²

This is where stillness acquires practical importance. Stillness need not mean escaping ordinary life or producing an unusual spiritual state. At its simplest, it is a deliberate turning of attention toward the divine presence, a temporary release of the noise that continually competes for consciousness. The external world may remain complicated, but for a moment we stop allowing every demand, fear, memory, and anticipation to speak at once.

Several of the supplementary messages used throughout this book connect such inward quiet with spiritual guidance. “The Road to Perfection” encourages returning to the Silence as part of the continuing movement toward greater self-mastery and love, while “Effort and Struggle” connects sincere faith with communion with the divine Fragment within. These teachings are valuable when stillness is understood not as a technique for escaping responsibility but as a way of becoming more centered before returning to it.¹⁴³

The purpose of inward communion is not to remain inward forever. We turn toward the Father so that our outward life can become better aligned with what we discover there. Stillness that never affects relationships, choices, attitudes, or service remains incomplete. The person who spends time seeking divine guidance but repeatedly refuses patience, honesty, mercy, or responsibility in ordinary circumstances has separated spirituality from life.

True presence brings the two together. The Father within is not present only during formal prayer. If the Thought Adjuster accompanies the mortal mind throughout the journey, then divine

companionship belongs to the workplace, the kitchen, the hospital room, the classroom, the car, the difficult conversation, the quiet evening, and the ordinary morning. We do not repeatedly leave God behind when we return to daily activity.¹⁴⁴

This recognition can change the quality of ordinary tasks. A task does not become spiritually meaningful because we attach religious language to it. It becomes meaningful through the values expressed while doing it. Washing dishes can remain washing dishes. Completing paperwork can remain paperwork. Driving to work can remain driving to work. Yet patience, gratitude, responsibility, attentiveness, and service can be practiced in those moments.

“The Benefits of Work” emphasizes precisely this possibility. It presents ordinary labor as an environment in which discipline, responsibility, perseverance, ethics, and service can develop and encourages the individual to do the best possible work within present circumstances. The present moment therefore does not need to be extraordinary before it can participate in the development of an extraordinary destiny.¹⁴⁵

This perspective also changes our relationship with waiting. Much of life involves waiting for something: an answer, an opportunity, healing, a change in circumstances, another person’s decision, the completion of a process, or simply the passage of time. Waiting easily feels like an empty interval between meaningful events. Yet the person who is waiting is still becoming.

We can spend a season of waiting consumed entirely by the future event, or we can recognize that the waiting period contains its own opportunities. Perhaps patience is developing. Perhaps preparation is possible. Perhaps relationships that would otherwise be overlooked need attention. Perhaps we are learning that our peace cannot depend entirely upon controlling an outcome.

This does not mean we should romanticize delay or avoid taking action when action is available. “The Seasons of Life” distinguishes between planning, doing, and resting and encourages discernment regarding which season a situation requires. Presence therefore includes recognizing what the present moment actually asks. Sometimes it asks us to wait. Sometimes it asks us to act.¹⁴⁶

The difference is important because fear can disguise itself as patience. We may tell ourselves that we are waiting for the right moment when in reality we are avoiding a difficult decision. Conversely, impatience can disguise itself as courage, pushing us to act before adequate preparation. Present awareness helps us examine these motives more honestly.

The question is not simply, “What do I want to happen next?” but, “What is mine to do now?” This is one of the most practical questions a person seeking the Father’s will can ask. We cannot control every outcome, but there is often something available to us in the present: a decision, a conversation, an apology, a task, a period of preparation, a request for help, an act of service, a moment of rest, or the willingness to wait without surrendering hope.

Hope itself lives strangely between present and future. It looks toward what has not yet happened while strengthening the person who must live now. Genuine hope does not require pretending to know exactly how circumstances will unfold. It is confidence that present incompleteness does not exhaust future possibility.

This is particularly important when the present is painful. Advice about living in the moment can sound shallow when the moment contains grief, fear, illness, loneliness, or serious difficulty. Presence does not mean enjoying every experience. It means refusing to demand that reality be different before we can meet it truthfully.

Grief must sometimes be grieved in the present. Fear must sometimes be acknowledged before courage can respond. Pain may need treatment rather than reinterpretation. A difficult relationship may require boundaries rather than greater endurance. Living spiritually in the present does not mean passively accepting everything that happens. Sometimes the most faithful response to the present is to begin changing it.

“Great Opportunities” speaks of creating goodness, beauty, truth, mercy, and love even within imperfect conditions and presents difficult circumstances as opportunities for spiritual progress rather than evidence that progress is impossible. This principle must be applied carefully. Evil does not become good simply because something can be learned from it. Injustice should not be called the Father’s will merely

because courage may arise in response. The spiritual possibility lies in what the person chooses to create from the situation.¹⁴⁷

This is one of the great powers of the present moment: while we cannot change what has already happened, we can participate in determining what happens next. The past may explain our present condition, but it does not possess absolute authority over our future character.

Forgiveness demonstrates this vividly. An injury belongs to the past, but resentment carries it into the present. “Inner Freedom” describes forgiveness as a release from grudges, anger, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation. Forgiveness cannot make the injury unhappen. What it can change is the relationship between the injury and the person we are becoming now.¹⁴⁸

The same applies to regret over our own actions. There are choices we may wish we could remake. If correction or restitution is possible, the present gives us the opportunity to attempt it. If nothing can undo what happened, we can still allow the experience to educate our next decision. Regret becomes spiritually useful when it produces wisdom; it becomes destructive when it convinces us that the future must forever remain imprisoned by the past.

This is why self-forgiveness and presence are closely connected. We cannot live fully in the present while continually prosecuting an earlier version of ourselves. We can remember, take responsibility, and learn without endlessly repeating the sentence of condemnation.

The opposite danger is living entirely for the future. Spiritual seekers can become especially vulnerable to this because the ascension career provides such a magnificent horizon. If eternity lies ahead, present life can appear small by comparison. Yet the proper conclusion is the opposite. Mortal life matters precisely because it is the beginning of that continuing journey.

“The Matter of Eternity” presents mortal existence as foundational to the ascending career and describes continuing progression through increasingly advanced stages toward the ultimate destiny of becoming perfect like the Universal Creator. The existence of those future stages does not diminish the present one. A foundation matters because of what will eventually rest upon it.¹⁴⁹

We are learning here things that will remain meaningful because they become part of us. Courage learned here is not wasted because a larger universe lies ahead. Love practiced here is not temporary merely because greater love remains possible. The lessons of mortality become part of the experiential person who continues.

This allows us to hold eternity and the present together without sacrificing either. Eternity prevents us from demanding completion now. The present prevents us from postponing growth until eternity. We can be patient about the destination while remaining attentive to the step before us.

The same balance applies to happiness. If happiness requires completed perfection, no evolutionary creature could legitimately be happy until the end of the entire ascent. Yet happiness can accompany growth. “Natural Happiness” directs attention away from external comparison and toward an inward life increasingly oriented to truth, beauty, goodness, and the divine ideal. Happiness, in this sense, is not the reward given only after perfection. It can be one of the fruits of moving toward perfection.¹⁵⁰

This happiness does not require constant pleasure. A meaningful life can contain sorrow, sacrifice, uncertainty, and struggle. Happiness at a deeper level can coexist with difficulty because it arises partly from alignment: the growing sense that we are living in a direction worthy of the person we are becoming.

There may be tears within such a life. There may be unanswered questions. There may be days when confidence is weak. Yet beneath these fluctuations can develop a more durable orientation: I belong to the Father; my life has purpose; my present incompleteness is not my final condition; I can choose again; I can learn; I can love; I can serve; I can continue.¹⁵¹

Such an orientation produces gratitude. Gratitude is one of the practices that restores us to the present because it requires noticing what already exists. Ambition naturally looks toward what is missing. Gratitude notices what has been given.

The two need not oppose one another. We can desire growth while appreciating our present stage. We can seek improvement while being grateful for what already functions well. We can hope for future opportunities while valuing the people currently beside us. We can seek

greater knowledge while being grateful for what we presently understand.

Without gratitude, the pursuit of perfection can become a permanent consciousness of deficiency. There will always be something more to learn, more character to develop, and a higher level to reach. If we refuse happiness until nothing remains incomplete, happiness will be postponed indefinitely.

The Father's command to become perfect should therefore not make us enemies of the present. The present is where the command is being fulfilled.

This truth also protects us from the illusion that one future achievement will finally complete us. Human beings often transfer this expectation from one goal to another. We imagine that a relationship, career, possession, recognition, spiritual experience, or level of understanding will provide final satisfaction. When it does not, another goal takes its place. The problem is not aspiration itself but expecting finite achievements to perform the work of an infinite destiny.

Our deepest hunger points farther than any single earthly attainment. "The Satisfaction of the Ages" describes the divine presence within as continually drawing the personality forward, inward, and upward toward the realization of potentials and the eventual destiny of becoming perfect like the Creator. If our destiny is truly that vast, it is understandable that no temporary accomplishment can permanently satisfy every spiritual longing.¹⁵²

Yet this does not make finite joys meaningless. A beautiful moment need not last forever to be real. A friendship need not satisfy every need to be precious. An achievement need not complete us to be worth celebrating. A season of happiness need not become permanent before we are permitted to enjoy it.

Presence allows us to receive finite goods without demanding that they become infinite. We can enjoy them, learn from them, share them, and eventually release them when life moves forward.

The same is true of ourselves. We can accept the person we are now without declaring that no further growth is necessary. Acceptance and aspiration can coexist. We can say, in effect, "This is where I am, and from here I will continue toward the Father."

There is great peace in that position because it removes the need to pretend. We do not need to present ourselves to God as more advanced than we are. The divine presence already knows the condition of the human mind it indwells. Spiritual honesty therefore begins with reality.

From reality, the next step becomes possible.

Sometimes the next step will be large, but often it will be almost invisible. We may need to pause before answering, forgive one more time, complete an ordinary responsibility faithfully, ask for help, rest without guilt, speak a truth gently, abandon a resentment, or spend a few quiet moments remembering the Father within. None of these actions completes the journey, but the journey is made from actions such as these.

The present moment is therefore not small simply because it is brief. It is the point at which eternity continually enters experience through choice. The future becomes character only after passing through the present.

We need not carry the entire journey at once. We cannot. The destination belongs to the ages, and the Father has provided the ages through which it may be reached. Our responsibility is more immediate. We can choose the direction now.

We can practice the Father's will now. We can seek truth now. We can create goodness now. We can recognize beauty now. We can forgive now. We can serve now. We can turn inward toward the divine presence now. We can begin again now.

Perfection is the destination, but the present is where we walk.

As this realization deepens, the immense length of the ascension journey becomes less intimidating. We are not asked to cross eternity in a single act of will. We are asked to remain faithful to the direction through the experiences given to us, one stage after another. Mortal life is one such stage, not the whole journey. Beyond it lies a universe career in which the education begun here continues on a scale we can presently understand only in part. To understand why the mandate can confidently call an imperfect mortal toward divine perfection, we must therefore lift our view beyond the boundaries of this life and consider the goal of the ages.¹⁵³

Chapter 12 — The Goal of the Ages

The command to become perfect takes on an entirely different character when it is viewed against the background of eternity. If mortal life were the only period available for achieving the Father's mandate, the command could easily appear impossible. A few decades of human experience would seem inadequate for the transformation of an evolutionary creature into a perfected being capable of standing before the Universal Father. But the journey described in *The Urantia Book* is not confined to the years between birth and death. Mortal life is the beginning of an ascending career whose destination lies far beyond the present world.¹⁵⁴

This larger perspective is essential to everything we have considered so far. It explains why the mandate can be both absolute in destination and progressive in attainment. The Father can call the finite creature toward perfection without requiring the creature to accomplish the entire journey immediately. The goal is not lowered because the journey is long. Instead, the universe provides the experience through which the goal can eventually be reached.

We are accustomed to thinking of human life as a complete story. Birth appears to be the beginning, death the ending, and everything between them the whole field of personal development. From the perspective of the ascension career, however, mortal existence is more like the opening stage of an education whose later levels cannot yet be fully imagined. What begins here matters greatly, but it is not expected to finish here.

This understanding immediately corrects one of the most persistent misconceptions about spiritual perfection: the idea that death itself somehow produces it. Death changes the conditions of existence, but it does not logically transform an unfinished personality into a completed one merely because material life has ended. If character develops through experience, choice, learning, love, service, and increasing

cooperation with divine leading, then the continuation of personality implies the continuation of development.

“The Worlds on the Road to Perfection” makes this point explicitly. It presents character building as a process begun during mortal life and continued in the existence beyond it, rejecting the idea that death automatically makes a person perfect. It describes subsequent stages as opportunities for correction, growth, purification of habits, and increasing awareness while the individual continues toward the ultimate goal of perfection. This is consistent with the evolutionary pattern we have followed throughout this book: God does not bypass development simply because the environment changes.¹⁵⁵

There is something deeply reasonable about this. Consider how much remains unfinished even in a sincere and spiritually mature person at the end of mortal life. Understanding is partial. Experience is limited. Relationships have taught some lessons but not every lesson. Wisdom has developed but remains finite. Self-mastery may be considerable but incomplete. Love may have expanded greatly without yet approaching the breadth of divine love. If such incompleteness is natural to evolutionary existence, then continued education is not a punishment. It is a gift.

The universe career can therefore be understood as an extension of the Father’s patience. God does not demand that a child complete an eternal education in the first classroom. The mortal stage has its appropriate lessons, and subsequent stages provide further opportunities. Each level builds upon what came before while opening capacities that could not have been fully developed under previous conditions.

“The Matter of Eternity” describes mortal life as foundational and then looks beyond it toward continuing progression through the morontia worlds and the broader educational experiences of the local universe. It points toward advancement through successive stages and ultimately toward the destiny of becoming perfect like the Universal Creator. The details of such a career may be difficult for a mortal mind to visualize, but the principle is clear: growth continues.¹⁵⁶

This gives mortal life both greater importance and proper proportion. It is important because foundations matter. What we begin becoming here accompanies us into what follows. Yet mortal life also

gains proportion because every unfinished lesson does not need to be completed before death. We can take the present seriously without treating it as our only opportunity to acquire every conceivable form of spiritual maturity.

This balance protects us from two opposite errors. One is complacency: if eternity is long, perhaps nothing we do now matters very much. The other is spiritual panic: if we do not perfect ourselves immediately, perhaps we have failed the entire purpose of existence. Neither conclusion follows from the ascension plan. The long journey makes present decisions meaningful without making present incompleteness hopeless.

The seeds planted here matter because they establish direction. Faith matters. The consecration of the will matters. The decision to seek the Father matters. Love matters. Character matters. Our responses to truth, beauty, goodness, service, mercy, and divine leading matter. But these beginnings are allowed to become beginnings. Eternity provides room for their development.

This brings us back to one of the central distinctions of this book: the difference between deciding upon the destination and arriving there. The supreme decision can be made while the journey remains almost entirely ahead. A person can sincerely choose the Father's will without fully understanding everything that choice will eventually require. In fact, no mortal could comprehend all the experiences contained within an eternal ascent.

"The Goal of the Ages" emphasizes this limitation. It observes that full understanding comes through experience and that the mortal cannot know the entire path in advance, possessing instead a conception of the destination while progressing stage by stage. The message describes continued character refinement and increasing capacity throughout the ascent until the creature eventually approaches the perfected state appropriate to standing before the Perfect Creator. This provides an important spiritual principle: we do not need complete knowledge of the road before choosing its destination.¹⁵⁷

Much of human life already operates this way. A child beginning school cannot understand everything education will eventually require. A person entering marriage cannot experience in advance every circumstance the relationship will encounter. A new parent cannot fully

comprehend the decades of parenthood contained in the first decision to accept responsibility for a child. Meaningful commitments are often made before all their consequences can be known.

Faith operates similarly. Choosing God does not mean possessing a complete map of eternity. It means trusting the direction sufficiently to begin and continue.

This trust becomes especially important when we contemplate the scale of the journey. The idea of ascending through worlds and universe levels toward Paradise can inspire wonder, but it can also make the individual feel extraordinarily small. What significance could one mortal decision possess within such immensity?

Yet the very existence of the ascension plan answers the question. If the universe provides an educational pathway for evolutionary creatures, then evolutionary creatures matter. The enormous scale of creation does not diminish the individual; it reveals the magnitude of the purpose prepared for the individual.¹⁵⁸

The Father's command, "Be you perfect," is itself a declaration of destiny. It tells the creature that the distance between mortal incompleteness and divine perfection is not a reason for despair. There is a road connecting them.¹⁵⁹

We do not create that road. We respond to it.

The Thought Adjuster becomes especially significant in this larger perspective. The divine presence within is not merely an aid for improving mortal behavior. The Adjuster belongs to the entire destiny of the ascending personality. The Father who establishes the destination also provides within the mortal personality a direct spiritual presence oriented toward that destination.¹⁶⁰

"The Satisfaction of the Ages" describes this inner presence as continually drawing the individual forward, inward, and upward, stimulating the realization of potentials and urging the personality toward the destiny of becoming perfect like the Creator. What begins as a quiet inward influence during mortal life therefore belongs to a much greater story.¹⁶¹

This helps explain why spiritual development is so deeply personal. The ascension career is not merely movement through cosmic geography. Its essential meaning lies in what the ascending creature becomes. Traveling to higher worlds without corresponding growth in

character would miss the purpose. The journey is educational because the traveler must become increasingly capable of understanding, appreciating, and participating in higher realities.

Every stage therefore involves enlargement. Understanding expands. Experience expands. Capacity for relationship expands. Service expands. Spiritual perception expands. The creature becomes able to participate in realities that would have been incomprehensible at earlier stages.

We can see a small analogy in human development. An infant inhabits the same physical world as an adult but cannot understand most of what the adult understands. The limitation is not primarily geographical. The child must develop capacities before certain meanings become accessible. In the same way, higher spiritual realities may require capacities that an early evolutionary personality has not yet developed.

This is why experience cannot simply be replaced by information. We may read descriptions of love, courage, forgiveness, parenthood, grief, responsibility, or sacrifice, but reading is not equivalent to living them. Experience creates meanings that description alone cannot supply.

“The Goal of the Ages” stresses this experiential dimension by observing that understanding is acquired through living and that each stage of the ascent contributes something necessary to the expanding creature. The universe career is therefore not an arbitrary series of obstacles. It is an education suited to beings whose wisdom must be acquired experientially.¹⁶²

This also explains why our present struggles can possess lasting value. A difficulty overcome here contributes more than a memory of earthly hardship. It can produce courage. Forgiveness practiced here contributes to the development of mercy. Responsibility accepted here contributes to dependability. Service practiced here expands love. The circumstances themselves may pass, but what we become through them can endure.

The material stage of existence is therefore not spiritually inferior simply because it is early. Beginnings have unique value. There are lessons that belong precisely to beginning from limitation.

A creature who begins without complete knowledge learns faith. A creature who possesses genuine freedom learns choice. A creature living among other unfinished beings learns patience, mercy, cooperation, and forgiveness. A creature who encounters uncertainty learns courage. A creature who cannot control every circumstance learns trust.

These qualities would mean something different if they were simply installed within a finished being. Their experiential value arises partly because they are chosen and developed under conditions in which alternatives are possible.

The ascension career preserves this experiential identity. We do not become perfect by ceasing to be the person who began the journey. We become the perfected realization of that personality through accumulated experience, spiritual growth, and increasingly complete alignment with the Father.¹⁶³

This is important because perfection can otherwise sound like the erasure of individuality. If becoming perfect meant becoming indistinguishable from every other perfected creature, the journey would appear to end by destroying the uniqueness with which it began. But Godlikeness need not mean sameness.¹⁶⁴

Truth can be universally true while being understood and expressed through unique personalities. Love can be divine while taking countless personal forms. Service can pursue a common good through different abilities, experiences, and perspectives. The Father's children can become increasingly united in values without becoming identical in personality.

Indeed, experiential diversity may enrich service. The lessons one creature has learned can become useful to another. The particular road by which a person has developed patience, courage, mercy, or wisdom becomes part of the experiential wealth that person brings to future relationships and responsibilities.

This makes the struggles of mortal life appear differently. We need not romanticize suffering, but neither must we assume that everything difficult is spiritually wasted. The Father can draw lasting value from experiences that were themselves painful, unjust, or unwanted.

"Great Opportunities" describes this possibility by encouraging the creation of goodness in the presence of evil, light in darkness, mercy amid injustice, and love in response to hatred. The spiritual

achievement lies not in calling darkness good but in refusing to let darkness determine what we become.¹⁶⁵

Across the long ascent, this principle becomes part of experiential wisdom. We learn not merely that goodness is preferable to evil but why. We know through experience what resentment does to the inner life and what forgiveness can release. We know the difference between selfishness and service because we have experienced both. We learn the consequences of fear-driven choices and the freedom that courage can create.

Experiential creatures acquire wisdom partly by encountering alternatives and learning to choose higher values.

This also means that mistakes need not disappear from the meaning of our history once they have been overcome. A corrected mistake can contribute to wisdom. The person who has learned through failure may eventually possess a depth of understanding unavailable to someone who knows the principle only in theory.

The eternal career therefore does not require a perfect past. It requires a continuing willingness to learn.

This is a profoundly hopeful idea. None of us begins the ascent with an ideal history. We arrive at spiritual awareness carrying mistakes, ignorance, wounds, incomplete understanding, and habits developed under imperfect conditions. The Father's plan does not require us to rewrite our beginnings. It invites us to transform what those beginnings produce.

The same principle prevents us from reducing another person to his or her current condition. If the universe career is genuinely progressive, the person standing before us is not a finished product. We do not know what that personality may become through centuries and ages of experience, divine guidance, free choice, and service.

Someone spiritually immature today may eventually become extraordinarily wise. Someone struggling with fear may become courageous. Someone learning forgiveness through painful experience may someday become especially capable of helping others forgive. The evolutionary view asks us to see present reality honestly while leaving room for future possibility.

This is one reason fatherly love is appropriate to the ascension perspective. A good parent sees both the child who exists now and the

adult who may someday emerge. The child is loved in the present without being expected to remain permanently childish. Patience and expectation coexist.¹⁶⁶

The Father's love operates on an incomparably greater scale. Divine patience does not mean indifference to our choices. It means that God can work toward an eternal objective without demanding that every stage resemble the final stage.

The phrase "goal of the ages" therefore expresses more than distance. It expresses process. Ages are available because experience requires sequence. We become capable of one level of understanding, then another. We master one range of responsibilities and become prepared for greater ones. The horizon continues expanding.

"The Matter of Eternity" describes advancement through the mansion worlds, the system and constellation levels, the local universe headquarters, and beyond, presenting the ascent as an educational progression toward the Universal Father. Whatever details remain beyond present comprehension, the structure communicates a fundamental truth: perfection is approached through ordered growth rather than instantaneous transformation.¹⁶⁷

This should change how we think about time. Mortal impatience naturally asks how quickly something can be achieved. The universe perspective asks what must be experienced for the achievement to become real.

If wisdom requires experience, speed is not always the highest value. A shortcut that bypasses necessary growth would not actually bring us to the same destination because part of the destination is what we have become through the journey.

The Father does not merely want us to arrive somewhere. He intends that we become someone capable of being there.

This helps explain why service occupies such an important place throughout the ascension career. Spiritual development cannot remain purely private because increasing Godlikeness means increasing participation in the Father's outgoing love. As understanding expands, so does the capacity to contribute.¹⁶⁸

The universe school is therefore also a universe of service. What we learn becomes something we can give. Experience becomes useful. Wisdom becomes useful. Compassion becomes useful. The perfected

creature is not merely a creature who has accumulated spiritual accomplishments but one increasingly capable of participating intelligently and lovingly in divine purposes.

Even now, we can see the beginning of this pattern. Our experiences become most valuable when they enable us to help another person. Someone who has endured grief may know how to sit quietly with the grieving. Someone who has recovered from failure may know how to encourage the discouraged without offering shallow reassurance. Someone who has learned patience through parenting may carry that patience into other relationships.

What is learned becomes service.

The long journey toward perfection therefore does not turn attention away from other people. It should gradually make the ascending creature more capable of relationship. The closer we move toward the Father, the more deeply we should value the Father's children.

This protects the concept of ascension from becoming spiritual ambition. If Paradise were merely the universe's highest personal achievement, the journey could become another form of self-centered striving. But the perfection mandate is inseparable from becoming like the Father, and the Father's character is expressed in love and giving.

The destination therefore transforms the meaning of success. We ascend not merely to receive more but to become capable of giving more. Greater spiritual capacity brings greater possibilities of service.

The journey is personal but never merely private.

This understanding also brings perspective to death. Human grief at death is real because relationships matter and separation hurts. Nothing about an eternal perspective requires us to pretend otherwise. But death need not be understood as the completion of personality development or the annihilation of the journey. Within the ascension framework, it is a transition between stages.¹⁶⁹

The classroom changes; the student continues.

This does not mean that everything after death will be immediately familiar or easy. Continued growth implies continued learning, adjustment, and challenge. The next life is not meaningful because every difficulty disappears but because the conditions of progress continue under a larger horizon.

“The Worlds on the Road to Perfection” emphasizes precisely this continuity. Character development continues, corrections remain possible, and higher awareness progressively develops as the individual advances toward the ultimate goal. Death therefore does not replace the principle we have followed throughout this book. It extends it.¹⁷⁰

We choose, learn, grow, and continue.

This perspective can relieve one of the deepest anxieties associated with the perfection mandate. We do not need to finish today what the Father has provided ages for us to accomplish. Our responsibility is to use faithfully the stage we have been given.

That stage matters. Today matters. Mortal life matters. But it matters as the beginning of something greater, not as an impossible deadline for eternal completion.

The Father asks for the direction of the will now because direction determines the journey. We can choose the destination before we understand every road that leads toward it. We can decide that truth is preferable to falsehood, goodness to selfishness, love to hatred, service to exploitation, and the Father’s will to the narrow rule of the isolated self.

From that decision, experience begins to educate us.

There will be corrections. There will be discoveries that change our understanding. There will be stages of growth beyond anything we presently know. But the fundamental orientation can remain: Father, I want to become like you.

Such a desire may be simple when first expressed, but eternity can unfold its meaning.

The command “Be perfect” therefore contains extraordinary confidence in the creature. It assumes that the evolutionary child can become what the Father intends. Not instantly, not independently, and not without vast experience, but genuinely.¹⁷¹

The journey may be long because the destiny is great.

This is why the magnitude of the goal should produce hope rather than discouragement. We are not being asked to pretend that the distance is small. We are being told that the distance can be crossed.

The Father provides the destination. The divine presence provides guidance. The universe provides experience. Time provides opportunity. Free will provides participation.

And the ascending creature provides the choice to continue.

At every stage, the question returns in a new form: Will I choose truth? Will I choose goodness? Will I choose love? Will I trust the Father enough to take the next step? The circumstances change, understanding expands, and capacity increases, but the fundamental relationship between divine purpose and creature choice remains.

Eventually, what began as mortal faith becomes experiential certainty. What began as aspiration becomes increasingly established character. What began as the distant ideal of Godlikeness becomes the lived reality of a creature who has been transformed through ages of willing cooperation with the divine purpose.¹⁷²

The destination remains the Father.

This is the goal of the ages: not merely survival, not merely continued existence, and not merely entrance into a more beautiful world, but the progressive transformation of an evolutionary personality into a perfected creature capable of standing before the Universal Father and participating ever more fully in the purposes of divine love.¹⁷³

Mortal life is only the beginning, but beginnings matter. Here we first awaken to the possibility. Here we begin making the choices. Here we learn that freedom has purpose, that love has eternal value, that service enlarges the soul, that mistakes can become wisdom, and that God is not merely waiting at the distant end of the journey but is already present within us.

The road stretches through the ages, but the direction has been given from the beginning: become like the Father.

When this entire journey is viewed as one continuous purpose, the mandate no longer appears as an impossible demand placed upon an inadequate mortal. It becomes the declaration of what the Father intends his evolutionary children ultimately to become.

We begin imperfectly. We continue experientially. We advance freely. We are guided inwardly. We learn through love and service. We grow through worlds and ages.

And we move toward perfection.

The final question is therefore not whether mortal beings are already capable of possessing the perfection of God. Clearly, we are not. The

deeper question is whether we are willing to participate in the process by which the Father transforms potential into experiential reality.

If we are, then the command that began this book becomes increasingly understandable. “Be perfect” is both destination and invitation. It calls us toward the Father while assuring us that the universe career exists for the fulfillment of that call.

What remains is to bring all of these truths together: the Father’s mandate, the consecration of the will, the divine presence within, free choice, daily experience, Jesus’ example, love, service, practice, presence, and the long ascent toward Paradise. Together they reveal that becoming perfect is not one isolated spiritual achievement. It is the organizing purpose of an entire ascending life.

And that brings us to the final chapter: becoming like Him.

Chapter 13 — Becoming Like Him

At the beginning of this journey, the command seemed almost impossible: “Be you perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” The distance between an imperfect mortal and the Universal Father appears so great that the words can initially sound less like an invitation than an unreachable demand. We know our inconsistencies too well. We know how easily fear can overcome faith, how quickly patience can disappear, how difficult forgiveness can become, and how often our understanding falls short of our ideals. If perfection means that all of these limitations must immediately disappear, then the command would seem to ask us to become something other than evolutionary human beings. But that is not what the mandate requires. The Father calls evolutionary creatures toward an evolutionary attainment. The destination is perfection, but the road toward that destination is progressive. We begin where we are, with limited understanding, incomplete experience, genuine freedom, developing character, and the divine presence within. From that beginning, the Father calls us forward.¹⁷⁴

This distinction has guided everything we have considered. Perfection is the destination, not perfectionism. The decision can be made now even though the achievement belongs to the ages. We can choose the Father before we fully understand the Father. We can dedicate our will to divine purpose before we know everything that dedication will eventually require. We can begin becoming Godlike while remaining unmistakably unfinished. The mandate is given now, the decision can be made now, and the transformation begins now, but the achievement of perfection is the work of the ages. Once this distinction is understood, the command changes character. It no longer tells us to deny our evolutionary condition. It tells us what that condition is capable of becoming.

The question then becomes not, “Why am I not already perfect?” but, “What direction am I choosing?” Direction matters because free will lies near the center of the entire journey. The Father does not manufacture perfected personalities by eliminating their participation. We are invited into a process in which divine purpose and creature choice meet. God provides life, personality, spiritual guidance, truth, opportunity, and the eternal destination. We respond through decisions. “Great Freedom” expresses this responsibility directly by emphasizing that human decisions contribute to the kind of person one becomes and that the choice of perfection and Godlikeness can begin now through cooperation with the indwelling divine presence. The significance of freedom is therefore much greater than the ability to select among temporary alternatives. Freedom allows the creature to participate in the formation of character.¹⁷⁵

Every important theme in this book eventually returns to that participation. The Father’s will must be chosen. Divine guidance must be received and acted upon. Truth must be preferred to convenient falsehood. Goodness must become action. Love must move beyond sentiment into service. Forgiveness must eventually become more than an admired idea. Self-mastery requires repeated choices. Even faith becomes meaningful because uncertainty leaves room for trust. The journey toward perfection is therefore profoundly personal. No institution, teacher, philosophy, family tradition, or religious community can make the supreme spiritual decision for another person. These things can teach, encourage, clarify, and support, but the individual will must eventually answer for itself.

This is why the Father’s presence within is so significant. We are not asked to make the journey toward God while God remains infinitely distant. Within the framework presented by *The Urantia Book*, the Thought Adjuster represents the Father’s intimate presence within the mortal mind. The destination and the Guide come from the same divine Source. This does not mean that the human personality becomes passive. The Adjuster does not replace the human will. Divine leading and human choosing work together. Guidance presents higher possibilities, but personality must increasingly consent to them through experience.¹⁷⁶

“A Sense of Duty” describes the Thought Adjuster as progressively helping the mortal understand the Father’s will and encourages the individual to contemplate the highest conception of God—truth, beauty, goodness, and the qualities of the ideal divine Parent—and then consider what changes would make the human personality increasingly like that ideal. This gives the perfection mandate a practical form. We do not need to comprehend infinite perfection before taking the next step. We need enough understanding to recognize a higher possibility and enough willingness to choose it. Sometimes that higher possibility will appear spiritually significant, while at other times it will seem ordinary. It may be patience with a family member, honesty at work, courage during uncertainty, an apology after an argument, restraint when anger invites retaliation, generosity when selfishness would be easier, or a few quiet moments turning toward the Father when the mind has become overwhelmed.¹⁷⁷

The ordinary nature of these choices does not make them spiritually insignificant. The great destiny of personality is constructed through actual experience, and most actual experience occurs in ordinary life. This is why we spent so much time considering the classroom of daily existence. Work, family, friendship, responsibility, disappointment, conflict, success, failure, planning, action, and rest are not distractions from spiritual growth. They provide much of the material through which growth occurs. “Where You Stand” emphasizes that routine responsibilities provide genuine experiences through which important lessons can be learned, pointing even to Jesus’ period of family responsibility before his public teaching ministry. Spiritual life does not begin when ordinary life ends. The two become increasingly integrated.¹⁷⁸

The person seeking perfection therefore learns to ask a different kind of question about experience. Instead of asking only, “How do I get through this?” we may also ask, “What can I become through the way I meet this?” A difficult person may reveal our impatience. A failure may reveal pride. Success may reveal our dependence upon recognition. Responsibility may develop perseverance. Waiting may expose our need for control. Service may uncover motives we had not previously recognized. This does not mean God causes every difficulty in order to teach us a lesson. Such an interpretation can become cruel,

particularly when applied to tragedy or injustice. Evil should not be renamed divine instruction. But the Father's ability to work within experience means that even circumstances God did not will as evil can become occasions for courageous, loving, truthful, and spiritually creative responses.

"Great Opportunities" expresses this possibility through the challenge to create goodness in the presence of evil, light in darkness, mercy amid injustice, and love in the presence of hatred. The spiritual victory lies not in pretending darkness is light but in refusing to let darkness dictate what we become. This is one of the deepest meanings of becoming like God. Godlikeness is creative. It does not merely avoid wrongdoing; it brings something higher into situations where that higher value was previously absent. Truth enters where confusion prevailed, mercy enters where retaliation was expected, courage enters where fear dominated, and service enters where selfishness ruled.¹⁷⁹

Love is the highest expression of this creative movement because love turns spiritual growth outward. If the pursuit of perfection makes us increasingly preoccupied with ourselves, something has gone wrong. The Father's perfection is not self-enclosed. Divine goodness gives, creates, sustains, guides, and loves. The journey toward God must therefore increasingly enlarge our concern for others. "The Power of Connection" presents love as a transformative spiritual force and extends that love even toward enemies, emphasizing the possibility of becoming more Godlike through connection with the divine Source. Such love does not require emotional affection for everyone, nor does it eliminate accountability or healthy boundaries. It asks something more fundamental: that we refuse to deny another person's ultimate value before God.¹⁸⁰

This is difficult precisely because human beings are unfinished. We hurt one another. We misunderstand. We disappoint. We sometimes act selfishly, foolishly, or destructively. The evolutionary condition that requires patience from God also requires patience among God's children. Forgiveness therefore becomes part of becoming like Him. "Inner Freedom" connects forgiveness with release from anger, grudges, resentment, regret, and self-devaluation. Forgiveness does not declare that harm was acceptable. It prevents harm from possessing permanent authority over the inner life. We remember, learn, establish

boundaries where necessary, repair what can be repaired, and gradually refuse to allow hatred to determine our future character.¹⁸¹

We must eventually extend something of this mercy toward ourselves as well. An evolutionary creature who cannot forgive any personal failure will have difficulty enduring an evolutionary journey. We will make mistakes because we are learning. The important question is whether mistakes become excuses or teachers. “Practice Brings Perfection” offers one of the most useful images for understanding this process: the young child learning to walk. The child falls, rises, attempts another step, falls again, and continues. The falls are real, but no loving parent interprets them as evidence that the child should abandon walking. The effort itself is part of development.¹⁸²

So it is with spiritual character. We practice patience before patience becomes natural. We practice forgiveness while resentment still returns. We practice trust while uncertainty remains. We practice generosity while selfish impulses still exist, and we practice courage while fear continues to speak. Eventually, repeated choices begin to form character. This is why perfectionism is such a poor substitute for perfection. Perfectionism fixates upon the fall, while perfection learns how to rise. Perfectionism demands evidence that the journey is already complete, while the perfection mandate gives us a destination and invites us to keep moving toward it.

There is humility in accepting this process. We admit that we are not what we will become, but there is also tremendous dignity in recognizing what we may become. Humility should never be confused with believing ourselves worthless. If the Universal Father indwells the human mind and calls the human personality toward an eternal destiny, then human life possesses extraordinary value. The proper response is neither arrogance nor self-contempt but gratitude and responsibility. We have been given something to become.

This understanding changes how we view other people as well. Every person we encounter is more than the condition in which we presently see them. The difficult coworker, the confused friend, the rebellious child, the person who has failed, and even the person whose values sharply conflict with our own remain unfinished personalities. This does not mean everyone will make the same choices. Freedom remains real. But it means we should be cautious about treating present

imperfection as final identity. The ascension perspective makes such final judgments especially inappropriate because the person before us may have ages of experience ahead. We do not know what future wisdom, love, service, and courage may emerge from a life presently struggling to understand itself.

We are all somewhere on the road, and “The River” provides a useful image once again. The destination is perfection, the river represents evolutionary movement, and the current represents the Father’s will. Freedom allows individuals to resist, explore, move slowly, or cooperate more fully with the current. Choices aligned with truth, beauty, goodness, and love participate more effectively in the movement toward the destination. The metaphor also reminds us that spiritual growth has direction. Not every choice is equally constructive simply because it is freely made. Freedom gains meaning through the possibility of choosing what is higher.¹⁸³

The Father’s will provides that orientation. Consecrating the will to God does not destroy freedom; it gives freedom its highest purpose. We remain thinking, choosing personalities. We continue learning, questioning, discerning, planning, and acting. But gradually a central desire organizes these activities: we want what we become to be increasingly consistent with the character and purpose of the Father. At first this desire may compete with many others. We want God, but we also want recognition. We want love, but we also want revenge. We want truth, but we also want comfort. We want service, but we also want control. Spiritual growth does not require pretending these conflicts do not exist. It requires bringing them honestly into the process of choice.¹⁸⁴

Over time, the personality can become increasingly unified. The Father’s will becomes less one competing interest among many and more the orientation through which other interests are evaluated. This is one reason Jesus remains indispensable to our understanding of the journey. In his life we see a human existence increasingly organized around relationship with the Father. He does not merely tell us that the Father’s will matters; his life demonstrates what sustained dedication to that will can look like within human experience. Yet, as “Great Freedom” reminds us, following Jesus does not mean mechanically

reproducing his historical actions. His life reveals principles capable of living again through different personalities in different circumstances.¹⁸⁵

We can share his direction without sharing his exact path. We can seek the Father, learn trust, practice mercy, develop courage, serve, become less governed by public approval, and become more grounded in our identity as children of God. We can increasingly allow love to organize the use of strength. Jesus demonstrates not the destruction of human personality by divine purpose but its fulfillment. This is what becoming like God ultimately means for the creature. We do not become the Father. We become increasingly Godlike while remaining the unique personalities the Father created us to be.

Perfection does not erase individuality. It frees individuality from distortions that prevent its highest expression. Selfishness narrows personality. Fear can imprison it. Resentment can occupy it. Pride can make it defensive. The need for approval can cause it to imitate others. As these limitations gradually lose power, the personality becomes freer to express truth, beauty, goodness, love, creativity, wisdom, and service in its own distinctive way. The more Godlike we become, the more truly ourselves we can become.¹⁸⁶

This helps explain why comparison is spiritually unproductive. We are not being perfected into copies of one another. Another person's gifts do not diminish ours, and another person's stage of development does not define our own. "Natural Happiness" warns against allowing external standards and comparison to determine the meaning and adequacy of life, directing attention instead toward the inner pursuit of truth, beauty, goodness, and the divine ideal. The question is not whether our life resembles someone else's. The question is whether our life is increasingly faithful to the divine possibilities within it.¹⁸⁷

This brings us again to the present moment. The destination may be Paradise, but we cannot live tomorrow's stage today. We cannot perform the tasks of future worlds while standing on this one. We can only respond to the opportunities available now, and that limitation is not a defect. It is how experience works. We learn today's lesson today. We can plan for tomorrow, remember yesterday, and contemplate eternity, but choice always occurs in the living present. The Father's will must therefore become practical here: What is the truthful thing now? What is the loving response now? What responsibility belongs to me

now? Is this a time to act or wait? Do I need to speak, listen, forgive, apologize, serve, rest, persevere, or change direction? These questions bring cosmic destiny into ordinary life.

“The Seasons of Life” reminds us that planning, action, and rest each have appropriate places and that wisdom includes discerning which season is presently required. Becoming perfect does not mean constant activity. Sometimes faithfulness works, sometimes it waits, sometimes it listens, and sometimes it rests. The journey is not a race against God. The Father is not impatiently standing at the end of eternity asking why an evolutionary child has not arrived sooner. The ages exist because the journey requires them.¹⁸⁸

“The Goal of the Ages” describes advancement stage by stage, with increasing capacity and character refinement throughout the long ascent toward the perfected condition appropriate to standing before the Perfect Creator. The scale of this journey should free us from the illusion that everything must be accomplished immediately, but it should not make today meaningless. The ages are made of stages, and stages are made of experiences. Mortal life is one of them. What we choose here becomes part of the person who continues.¹⁸⁹

“The Worlds on the Road to Perfection” emphasizes that death does not automatically complete the personality. Character development continues beyond mortal existence, with further opportunities for growth and correction along the road toward perfection. This means we can release the fear that every imperfection must disappear before death while retaining the responsibility to use mortal experience well. We do not have to finish here, but we should begin here. We begin by choosing the Father, learning to recognize divine values, practicing truth when falsehood would be convenient, choosing goodness when selfishness would be easier, recognizing beauty when ugliness tempts us toward cynicism, showing mercy when resentment calls for revenge, practicing courage when fear tells us to withdraw, and choosing love when separation seems more natural. We begin by serving, by failing and learning, and by beginning again.¹⁹⁰

Eventually, what begins here continues beyond here. “The Matter of Eternity” describes the progression through subsequent stages of the ascension career toward the ultimate destiny of becoming perfect like the Universal Creator. The mortal stage is therefore neither the whole

journey nor an insignificant preface. It is the place where an eternal adventure has already begun. The presence of the Thought Adjuster gives this adventure its deepest intimacy. The Father does not merely call from Paradise. Something of the Father accompanies us from within. The distant destination and the immediate presence belong to the same divine reality; we seek the Father while the Father is already reaching toward us.¹⁹¹

This changes prayer, stillness, and moral effort. We are not trying to attract the attention of a distant God who may or may not be interested in our progress. We are learning to cooperate with a divine presence already committed to our highest spiritual destiny. “The Satisfaction of the Ages” portrays this inner presence as continually urging the individual forward, inward, and upward toward the realization of spiritual potentials and eventual perfection. The entire journey can therefore be understood as an expanding partnership between creature willingness and divine guidance.¹⁹²

There will be times when that guidance seems difficult to recognize. Faith remains necessary because mortal consciousness does not possess uninterrupted certainty, but uncertainty does not eliminate relationship. We can continue seeking, choosing, and becoming. This is perhaps the simplest summary of the spiritual life described throughout these chapters. Becoming perfect is not one act. It is a direction repeatedly chosen until that direction becomes character, and character continues developing until the creature increasingly reflects the divine values toward which the journey has always pointed. Truth becomes truthfulness, goodness becomes goodness of character, love becomes loving service, faith becomes trust, choice becomes consecration, and experience becomes wisdom. Through this long transformation, the mortal child gradually becomes increasingly like the Father.¹⁹³

This transformation does not occur by rejecting our humanity. It begins through faithfully living it. We learn within families, friendships, work, conflict, responsibility, disappointment, joy, loss, success, failure, and service. Mortal experience supplies the first classroom in which divine ideals can become personal realities. There is no need to despise the classroom because greater schools lie ahead, nor should we confuse the classroom with the destination. We are students of eternity, and some lessons will be learned quickly while others will be learned slowly.

Some will be joyful and others difficult. Some will require repeated attempts. But the Father's purpose remains larger than any temporary failure.

When we fall, we can rise. When we become confused, we can seek truth. When resentment appears, we can practice forgiveness. When fear speaks, we can choose courage. When selfishness narrows our vision, we can serve. When we become exhausted, we can rest. When we forget the destination, we can turn again toward the Father. The road remains open. This is the hope contained within the perfection mandate. The command is not a declaration that God is dissatisfied because we are not already infinite. It is a revelation that finite creatures have been given an infinite horizon of growth.

The Father sees not only what we are but what we can become. Because the Father knows the destination completely, we can trust the process even when we see only the next portion of the road. We need not know every future world, understand every stage of ascension, or imagine exactly what perfected creature existence will be like. We need to know enough to choose the direction. The river moves toward the sea, the divine presence points toward the Father, Jesus reveals the way of living in relationship with that Father, our choices determine whether we increasingly cooperate with that direction, and the ages provide the experience through which the choice becomes reality.¹⁹⁴

This is the unity behind everything we have explored. The Father calls us to become like Him. The Thought Adjuster provides inward guidance. Jesus demonstrates what wholehearted dedication to the Father can look like within a human life. Daily experience provides the classroom, free will provides the choice, practice develops character, love gives character its highest expression, service turns love outward, stillness restores awareness of the divine presence, forgiveness frees us from the chains of the past, hope keeps the future open, and eternity provides the road. We are not asked to accomplish the entire journey today. We are asked to begin and to continue.¹⁹⁵

There is tremendous peace in understanding this. We can stop demanding that today contain tomorrow's perfection. We can release the exhausting attempt to appear complete. We can admit weakness without surrendering aspiration, acknowledge mistakes without abandoning hope, and accept our present stage without mistaking it for

our final condition. At the same time, there is tremendous responsibility in this understanding. We cannot hide forever behind the claim that we are imperfect. Evolutionary status explains why growth is necessary; it does not excuse the refusal to grow. The Father gives time, guidance, opportunity, and experience, but free will remains ours. The next choice remains ours, and that choice may appear small, but small choices accumulate into direction, and direction becomes destiny.

We may never know during mortal life how many seemingly ordinary decisions contributed to our spiritual development. The moment we chose not to retaliate, the time we admitted we were wrong, the day we continued despite discouragement, the kindness offered without recognition, the decision to forgive, the quiet prayer during uncertainty, or the work done honestly when no one was watching may contain more eternal significance than we presently understand. These are moments in which potential becomes reality, the creature chooses the Creator's direction, and becoming occurs.

One day, far beyond the limits of this present life, the evolutionary child who first turned uncertainly toward God may stand in a condition of maturity that the mortal mind cannot presently imagine. The road between those two points will contain worlds, teachers, relationships, decisions, discoveries, service, worship, and experiences beyond our current comprehension. Yet there will be continuity. The person who arrives will be the person who began, transformed through the journey but not erased by it. The child will have grown, and the promise contained in the mandate will have become experiential reality. Perhaps then we will understand more fully why the Father could speak to an imperfect creature and confidently say, "Be perfect." He was not describing what we already were. He was revealing what we could become.¹⁹⁶

That revelation changes the way we live now. We do not need to wait until Paradise to begin reflecting the Father. Every act of sincere love already points toward Him. Every choice of truth moves in His direction. Every act of mercy resembles something of His character. Every moment of genuine service allows divine goodness to become visible through an evolutionary personality. We will express these things imperfectly for a long time, but imperfect expression can still be genuine expression. A child's first steps are not worthless because they

are unsteady. They are precious because they reveal that walking has begun.

So we continue the journey by seeking the Father without pretending that we have already discovered everything there is to know about Him. We cooperate with the divine presence within without claiming certainty where faith is still required. We study Jesus not merely to admire him but to discover how a human life can become increasingly unified around the Father's will. We treat daily life as the classroom it is, our relationships as opportunities to learn love, our mistakes as opportunities for wisdom, and our freedom as the sacred capacity through which destiny becomes personal. We practice, forgive, serve, and rest when rest is needed. When we fall, we rise again. We remain patient with the process without becoming indifferent to the next step, remembering that no sincere movement toward truth, beauty, goodness, love, and the Father is wasted.

Above all, we refuse to confuse incompleteness with hopelessness. We are unfinished because we are becoming. The road is long because the destination is magnificent. The Father who calls us toward perfection has not left us alone on the road. His presence accompanies us, his love surrounds the journey, his will provides its direction, his universe provides its education, and his Son has shown us the living meaning of dedication to the Father. Our freedom allows us to answer, and that answer need not wait for some future world. It can begin today.

Our response can therefore be simple even though the journey is immense. We can choose the Father's way and ask to be taught truth, to recognize goodness, to see beauty, to love his children, to learn from our mistakes, to forgive, to serve, and to make wiser choices. We can ask that our character be transformed through every stage of the long journey ahead so that we become increasingly like Him. Such a prayer does not claim perfection. It chooses perfection, and the choice is where the journey begins.

Afterword — The Journey Has Already Begun

A book about becoming perfect must end without pretending that the subject has been completed. The very idea explored throughout these pages prevents such a conclusion. If perfection is the goal of the ages, then understanding it is also progressive. We see enough to choose the direction long before we understand everything the journey will reveal.¹⁹⁷

Perhaps the most important realization is that the Father's mandate does not ask us to become someone entirely different before approaching Him. We approach as the evolutionary children we presently are. We bring our questions, limitations, unfinished character, mistakes, hopes, fears, and sincere desires for something higher. From there, the journey continues.

The Father's call does not begin with condemnation of our incompleteness. It begins with possibility. We are creatures capable of growth, capable of choosing, capable of loving, capable of learning wisdom from experience, and capable of developing a relationship with the divine presence within. The command to become perfect reveals what those capacities can ultimately become.

This makes spiritual life both simpler and greater than the pursuit of religious perfectionism. We do not need to spend our lives attempting to prove that we are spiritually complete. We need to continue choosing the direction of the Father. When we discover weakness, we can work with it. When we make mistakes, we can learn from them. When we hurt someone, we can attempt repair. When fear appears, we can practice courage. When resentment appears, we can practice forgiveness. When selfishness closes us inward, we can turn outward through service.

None of these choices is insignificant. Character is built through experience, and experience is composed largely of moments that seem ordinary while we are living them. We may not recognize the eternal

significance of a decision when we make it. We simply know that one response is more truthful, more loving, more courageous, more merciful, or more consistent with the person we believe the Father is calling us to become. This is enough for the next step. We do not need to see Paradise in order to walk toward it. We need direction.

The Father provides that direction through the eternal invitation to become like Him. The Thought Adjuster provides inward guidance. Jesus provides the supreme human example of a life oriented toward the Father. Our relationships provide opportunities to learn love. Our responsibilities provide opportunities to develop character. Our failures provide opportunities for wisdom. Service provides opportunities to move beyond ourselves. Time provides experience, and eternity provides room for that experience to reach its intended fulfillment.¹⁹⁸

The journey will therefore contain many beginnings. We will understand something and later understand it more deeply. We will believe we have forgiven and discover another layer of resentment that must be released. We will develop courage in one situation and discover fear in another. We will learn to trust God under one set of circumstances and then encounter circumstances requiring a deeper trust. This does not necessarily mean we are returning to the beginning. Growth often moves upward through familiar lessons encountered at greater depth. The river continues.¹⁹⁹

There may be stretches in which progress feels rapid and others in which movement is difficult to perceive. There may be periods of spiritual clarity followed by uncertainty. There may be joy, grief, confidence, doubt, success, failure, activity, and rest. None of these temporary conditions alone defines the whole journey. Direction remains more important than momentary feeling.²⁰⁰

When we lose our way, we can turn again. When we fall, we can rise again. When we forget the Father, we can remember again. When we become discouraged by the distance still ahead, we can return to the next available step. This is the freedom given to an evolutionary child of God: the freedom to choose again.²⁰¹

One day the journey that presently exceeds our imagination may become the history of who we have become. The experiences that seem disconnected now may reveal their contribution to a much larger education. The struggles through which we learned patience, courage,

forgiveness, faith, and love may become part of the wisdom with which we serve others.²⁰²

We cannot yet see that completed story. We do not need to. For now, we have the present life, the opportunities before us, the divine presence within, and the freedom to respond. The Father has given the destination. The road has already begun beneath our feet. And the invitation remains: **Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.**²⁰³

Notes

Numbered citations identify the sources behind the adjoining discussion. References to The Urantia Book use paper:section.paragraph numbers from the Urantia Foundation Standard Reference Text. Ranges identify consecutive paragraphs. Supplementary received messages are identified by title, attributed speaker, receiver, and date; these citations refer to the author-supplied, unpaginated transcripts. These messages are separate from The Urantia Book. The author's analogies, practical applications, and conclusions interpret these sources and should not be read as quotations from them.

1. The Urantia Book, 140:5.15; 1:0.3–1:0.5.
2. The Urantia Book, 111:5.4–111:5.6.
3. The Urantia Book, 111:1.1–111:1.5.
4. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.6.
5. The Urantia Book, 196:0.1–196:0.3; 196:0.10; 196:0.13; 196:1.3.
6. The Urantia Book, 47:3.1; 47:3.7; 48:8.3.
7. The Urantia Book, 181:2.25.
8. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3.
9. The Urantia Book, 1:0.5.
10. The Urantia Book, 111:5.4–111:5.6; 181:2.25.
11. The Urantia Book, 111:5.1–111:5.6.
12. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Where You Stand.” November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
13. The Urantia Book, 196:0.2.
14. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.3.
15. The Urantia Book, 107:7.4; 111:1.1–111:1.5.

16. Supplementary received message: Uteah, through Chris Maurus. "Augment the Quality of Your Decisions." May 10, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
17. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The River." August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
18. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Opportunities." May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
19. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
20. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
21. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Where You Stand." November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
22. The Urantia Book, 196:0.1–196:0.3; 196:0.10.
23. The Urantia Book, 1:0.5–1:0.6.
24. The Urantia Book, 26:4.12–26:4.13. The distinction in these paragraphs concerns arrival in Havona; the manuscript applies it interpretively to the direction of mortal growth.
25. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
26. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. "Be You Perfect in Your Own Day and Time," Parts 1 and 2. October 17 and October 23, 2016. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
27. The Urantia Book, 107:2.1–107:2.4. Supplementary received message: Damascus Scribe (Sananda), through George Barnard. "We Will Be There." May 10, 2016. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
28. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
29. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Inner Freedom." April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
30. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Road to Perfection." September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

31. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Opportunities.” May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Days.” August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
32. The Urantia Book, 111:5.1–111:5.6.
33. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Where You Stand.” November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
34. The Urantia Book, 111:5.5–111:5.6.
35. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “A Sense of Duty.” September 25, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
36. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Opportunities.” May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
37. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The Benefits of Work.” September 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
38. The Urantia Book, 140:10.4.
39. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Only True and Pure Constant in Your Life.” October 15, 2017. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
40. The Urantia Book, 110:5.1; 110:5.5–110:5.6.
41. Supplementary received message: Uteah, through Chris Maurus. “Augment the Quality of Your Decisions.” May 10, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
42. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.3.
43. The Urantia Book, 107:0.3–107:0.6.
44. The Urantia Book, 111:1.1–111:1.5; 107:7.4.
45. The Urantia Book, 107:7.4.
46. The Urantia Book, 110:4.2; 110:5.5–110:5.6.
47. The Urantia Book, 110:5.6.
48. The Urantia Book, 108:5.6.
49. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “A Sense of Duty.” September 25, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
50. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Only True and Pure Constant in Your Life.” October 15, 2017. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
51. The Urantia Book, 111:1.3–111:1.5.

52. The Urantia Book, 111:2.2–111:2.9. Supplementary received message: Uteah, through Chris Maurus. “Augment the Quality of Your Decisions.” May 10, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
53. The Urantia Book, 143:2.2–143:2.4.
54. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Road to Perfection.” September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
55. The Urantia Book, 112:0.1. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Matter of Eternity.” March 31, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
56. The Urantia Book, 111:1.1–111:1.5.
57. The Urantia Book, 111:1.3–111:1.5.
58. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Freedom.” June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
59. The Urantia Book, 118:6.5–118:6.7.
60. The Urantia Book, 143:2.3–143:2.4.
61. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Practice Brings Perfection.” September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
62. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Inner Freedom.” April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
63. The Urantia Book, 107:0.4–107:0.6. Supplementary received message: Uteah, through Chris Maurus. “Augment the Quality of Your Decisions.” May 10, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
64. The Urantia Book, 140:8.26.
65. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. “The Seasons of Life.” November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
66. The Urantia Book, 140:8.20–140:8.23; 196:0.7.
67. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The River.” August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
68. The Urantia Book, 111:5.4–111:5.6.
69. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “Be You Perfect in Your Own Day and Time,” Parts 1 and 2. October 17 and October 23, 2016. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
70. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Days.” August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

71. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Where You Stand." November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
72. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The Benefits of Work." September 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
73. The Urantia Book, 140:5.1–140:5.3.
74. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Effort and Struggle." March 8, 2007. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
75. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
76. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
77. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
78. The Urantia Book, 129:4.3–129:4.6.
79. The Urantia Book, 196:0.13.
80. The Urantia Book, 196:0.7; 129:4.3–129:4.6.
81. The Urantia Book, 196:0.13; 196:1.3; 140:8.26.
82. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Freedom." June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
83. The Urantia Book, 196:0.1–196:0.3; 196:0.7; 196:0.10; 129:4.5.
84. The Urantia Book, 196:0.3.
85. The Urantia Book, 126:2.2–126:2.3; 127:0.1; 129:0.1. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Where You Stand." November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
86. The Urantia Book, 126:2.2–126:2.3.
87. The Urantia Book, 128:1.1. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated. The discussion of seasons and preparation is an application of these sources.
88. The Urantia Book, 143:3.1–143:3.3; 140:8.21–140:8.23. The manuscript draws practical lessons from Jesus' rest and his compassionate but discerning conduct.

89. The Urantia Book, 140:8.26.
90. The Urantia Book, 140:5.12; 140:8.12.
91. The Urantia Book, 140:5.1–140:5.3. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “Be You Perfect in Your Own Day and Time,” Part 2. October 23, 2016. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
92. The Urantia Book, 140:3.15. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Power of Connection.” November 15, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
93. The Urantia Book, 140:5.17.
94. The Urantia Book, 140:5.12.
95. The Urantia Book, 143:2.1–143:2.4. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Road to Perfection.” September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
96. The Urantia Book, 196:0.5; 196:0.9. The discussion of praise and criticism is the author’s application of Jesus’ steadiness and humility.
97. The Urantia Book, 140:8.20.
98. The Urantia Book, 143:3.1–143:3.3; 140:8.12.
99. The Urantia Book, 196:0.7; 196:0.10.
100. The Urantia Book, 196:0.7.
101. The Urantia Book, 196:1.3.
102. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “A Sense of Duty.” September 25, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
103. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “About Admiration.” September 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
104. The Urantia Book, 196:0.13; 196:1.3.
105. The Urantia Book, 111:1.5. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Days.” August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
106. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Where You Stand.” November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
107. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Inner Freedom.” April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
108. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The Benefits of Work.” September 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

109. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Opportunities." May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
110. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
111. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
112. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
113. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
114. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
115. The Urantia Book, 140:5.1–140:5.3.
116. The Urantia Book, 140:5.1–140:5.3.
117. The Urantia Book, 140:5.12.
118. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. "The Power of Connection." November 15, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
119. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Inner Freedom." April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
120. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Effort and Struggle." March 8, 2007. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
121. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The Benefits of Work." September 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
122. The Urantia Book, 140:8.12.
123. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. "The Power of Connection." November 15, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
124. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The River." August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

125. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. "The Power of Connection." November 15, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
126. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Where You Stand." November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
127. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
128. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Road to Perfection." September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
129. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
130. The Urantia Book, 111:1.1–111:1.5; 107:7.4.
131. Supplementary received message: Uteah, through Chris Maurus. "Augment the Quality of Your Decisions." May 10, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
132. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Effort and Struggle." March 8, 2007. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
133. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Freedom." June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
134. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Worlds on the Road to Perfection." December 9, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
135. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
136. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
137. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
138. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Inner Freedom." April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
139. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Practice Brings Perfection." September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

140. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Natural Happiness." September 19, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
141. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
142. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Road to Perfection." September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
143. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Road to Perfection." September 22, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Effort and Struggle." March 8, 2007. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
144. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.6.
145. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The Benefits of Work." September 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
146. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
147. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Opportunities." May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
148. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "Inner Freedom." April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
149. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Matter of Eternity." March 31, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
150. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Natural Happiness." September 19, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
151. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
152. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Satisfaction of the Ages." June 8, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
153. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Goal of the Ages." September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

154. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3–1:0.6; 181:2.25.
155. The Urantia Book, 47:3.7. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Worlds on the Road to Perfection.” December 9, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
156. The Urantia Book, 48:8.3–48:8.4. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Matter of Eternity.” March 31, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
157. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Goal of the Ages.” September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
158. The Urantia Book, 48:8.3–48:8.4.
159. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3–1:0.4.
160. The Urantia Book, 107:0.2–107:0.6.
161. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Satisfaction of the Ages.” June 8, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
162. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Goal of the Ages.” September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
163. The Urantia Book, 112:0.1.
164. The Urantia Book, 140:8.26.
165. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Opportunities.” May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
166. The Urantia Book, 140:5.12.
167. The Urantia Book, 47:7.4; 47:10.7; 48:8.3–48:8.4. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Matter of Eternity.” March 31, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
168. The Urantia Book, 48:8.3–48:8.4.
169. The Urantia Book, 112:5.22; 47:3.7.
170. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Worlds on the Road to Perfection.” December 9, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
171. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3–1:0.6.
172. The Urantia Book, 26:4.13.

173. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3–1:0.6. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Goal of the Ages.” September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
174. The Urantia Book, 140:5.15; 1:0.5.
175. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Freedom.” June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
176. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.6.
177. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “A Sense of Duty.” September 25, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
178. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Where You Stand.” November 11, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
179. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Opportunities.” May 23, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
180. Supplementary received message: Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Power of Connection.” November 15, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
181. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Inner Freedom.” April 16, 2008. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
182. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Practice Brings Perfection.” September 19, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
183. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The River.” August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
184. The Urantia Book, 111:5.5–111:5.6.
185. The Urantia Book, 196:0.7; 196:0.10. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Freedom.” June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
186. The Urantia Book, 140:8.26; 112:0.1.
187. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Natural Happiness.” September 19, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
188. Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. “The Seasons of Life.” November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.

189. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Goal of the Ages." September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
190. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Worlds on the Road to Perfection." December 9, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
191. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Matter of Eternity." March 31, 2020. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
192. The Urantia Book, 107:0.1–107:0.4. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Satisfaction of the Ages." June 8, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
193. The Urantia Book, 110:4.2; 110:5.5–110:5.6.
194. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The River." August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
195. The Urantia Book, 111:5.5; 107:0.3; 196:0.10.
196. The Urantia Book, 26:4.12–26:4.13. These passages concern the purpose and attainment of ascenders in Havona; the manuscript anticipates that future attainment.
197. Supplementary received message: Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. "The Goal of the Ages." September 11, 2006. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
198. The Urantia Book, 1:0.3; 107:0.3; 196:1.3.
199. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "The River." August 15, 2011. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
Supplementary received message: Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. "The Seasons of Life." November 12, 2015. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
200. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Days." August 28, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
201. The Urantia Book, 111:5.6. Supplementary received message: Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. "Great Freedom." June 24, 2014. Author-supplied transcript, unpaginated.
202. The Urantia Book, 112:5.22.
203. The Urantia Book, 140:5.15. The closing invitation uses a shortened rendering of the wording at 140:5.15.

References

Primary Source

Urantia Foundation. *The Urantia Book.* Chicago: Urantia Foundation.

The Urantia Book serves as the principal theological and cosmological foundation for this work. Particular attention was given to the following papers and teachings:

Paper 1 — “The Universal Father.” Used in discussing the nature of the Father, the relationship between finite creatures and the infinite God, the divine invitation to know God and become increasingly like Him, and the distinction between absolute divine perfection and progressive creature attainment.

Paper 26 — “Ministering Spirits of the Central Universe.” Used in relation to the progressive ascent of evolutionary creatures and the concept that perfection of purpose may precede completed perfection of attainment.

Paper 107 — “Origin and Nature of Thought Adjusters.” A major foundation for the discussion of the indwelling presence of the Universal Father, the Thought Adjuster as the divine partner of the mortal personality, and the relationship between the Father’s perfection mandate and the progressive ascension career. Of particular importance are the opening paragraphs of Paper 107, which directly connect the Adjuster’s indwelling with the command to become perfect and with the progressive attainment of the Father.

Paper 111 — “The Adjuster and the Soul.” Used in the discussion of the relationship between the human will and the divine presence, the formation of the evolving soul, destiny-bearing decisions, and the

principle that choosing the Father's will does not destroy human freedom but increasingly consecrates it to divine purpose.

Paper 118 — “Supreme and Ultimate—Time and Space.” Used in relation to creature freedom, experiential growth, the significance of human decisions, and the evolutionary choice to seek God and increasingly become like Him.

Part IV — “The Life and Teachings of Jesus.” Used throughout the manuscript as the primary living example of a human life centered upon the Father's will.

Particular attention was given to the papers describing Jesus' family responsibilities, adult life, public ministry, teachings concerning the Fatherhood of God, love, service, faith, and spiritual maturity, including the following:

Paper 126 — “The Two Crucial Years.”

Paper 127 — “The Adolescent Years.”

Paper 128 — “Jesus' Early Manhood.”

Paper 129 — “The Later Adult Life of Jesus.”

Paper 140 — “The Ordination of the Twelve.” Especially important to the discussion of the Father's perfection, fatherly love, spiritual character, and learning to love others as children of God.

Paper 196 — “The Faith of Jesus.” Used in the discussion of Jesus' personal relationship with the Father, living faith, wholehearted devotion to the Father's will, and the religion of personal spiritual experience.

Paper 47 — “The Seven Mansion Worlds.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 48 — “The Morontia Life.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 108 — “Mission and Ministry of Thought Adjusters.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 110 — “Relation of Adjusters to Individual Mortals.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 112 — “Personality Survival.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 143 — “Going Through Samaria.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript.

Paper 181 — “Final Admonitions and Warnings.” Cited in the Notes for the specific teachings discussed in the manuscript. The official Standard Reference Text of *The Urantia Book* is published and maintained by Urantia Foundation.

Urantia Foundation. The Urantia Book, Standard Reference Text, English online edition. <https://www.urantia.org/urantia-book-standardized> (accessed October 5, 2026). The Notes provide exact passage locators rather than edition-dependent page numbers.

Supplementary Sources

The following received messages were supplied by the author for study while preparing this manuscript. They were used as supplementary explanations, illustrations, and practical applications. They are distinct from *The Urantia Book* and are not presented in this work as part of *The Urantia Book*.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Be Ye Perfect Even as I Am Perfect.” September 18, 2006. Used in relation to the Father’s mandate, gradual spiritual growth, inner guidance, and the evolutionary journey toward perfection.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Practice Brings Perfection.” September 19, 2006. Used extensively in discussing practice, mistakes, persistence, spiritual development, self-forgiveness, and the analogy of a child repeatedly learning to walk.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Road to Perfection.” September 22, 2006. Used in discussing progressive self-mastery, awareness of thought and conduct, patience, compassion, love, spiritual discipline, and movement toward perfection step by step.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Satisfaction of the Ages.” June 8, 2006. Used in relation to the divine presence drawing the human personality forward, inward, and upward

toward the fulfillment of spiritual potential and the eventual attainment of the Creator.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Goal of the Ages.” September 11, 2006. Used in discussing the long ascension career, experiential understanding, progressive character refinement, and the ultimate goal of creature perfection.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Worlds on the Road to Perfection.” December 9, 2006. Used to emphasize that mortal death does not instantly complete spiritual development and that character formation and education continue during the ascending career.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Effort and Struggle.” March 8, 2007. Used in discussing faith, perseverance, struggle, tolerance, forgiveness, loving service, and the development of spiritual character through sincere effort.

Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “Inner Freedom.” April 16, 2008. Used in discussing forgiveness, release from resentment and regret, self-forgiveness, responsibility, and genuine spiritual freedom.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The River.” August 15, 2011. Used for the recurring river metaphor in which perfection is the destination, evolutionary existence is the journey, the Father’s will provides direction, and human freedom determines the degree of cooperation with that direction.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Opportunities.” May 23, 2014. Used in discussing the possibility of creating goodness, beauty, truth, mercy, and love within imperfect or difficult circumstances.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Great Freedom.” June 24, 2014. Used in discussing free will, responsibility, self-mastery, the choice to become Godlike, and the distinction between following the principles revealed in Jesus’ life and mechanically imitating his historical circumstances.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Days.” August 28, 2014. Used in discussing ordinary life, hope, spiritual significance, changing seasons of inner experience, and faithfulness during apparently uneventful days.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Natural Happiness.” September 19, 2014. Used in discussing genuine happiness, comparison, external standards of success, present-moment living, and the pursuit of truth, beauty, goodness, and the divine ideal.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “The Benefits of Work.” September 23, 2014. Used in discussing ordinary labor as an environment for discipline, perseverance, ethics, responsibility, service, and character development.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “About Admiration.” September 24, 2014. Used in discussing admiration of spiritually mature individuals, the example of Jesus, and the difference between appreciating another person’s qualities and merely attempting to imitate outward behavior.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “A Sense of Duty.” September 25, 2014. Used in discussing the Father’s will, Thought Adjuster guidance, contemplation of divine qualities, moral responsibility, and the progressive effort to make human character increasingly resemble the highest conception of God.

Thought Adjuster, through Oscar. “Where You Stand.” November 11, 2014. Used in discussing ordinary responsibilities as genuine spiritual opportunities, family experience, present circumstances, Jesus’ years of family responsibility, and the spiritual value of faithfully living where one presently stands.

Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Power of Connection.” November 15, 2015. Used in discussing love, spiritual connection, service, human relationships, love of enemies, and increasingly Godlike expressions of divine love.

Prolotheos, through Valdir Soares. “The Seasons of Life.” November 12, 2015. Used in discussing planning, action, waiting, rest,

discernment, adaptation to changing circumstances, and recognizing the different seasons of spiritual life.

Damascus Scribe (Sananda), through George Barnard. “We Will Be There.” May 10, 2016. Used in a limited supplementary role in discussing evolutionary development and the distinction between present spiritual progress and completed creature perfection.

Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “Be You Perfect in Your Own Day and Time,” Parts 1 and 2. October 17 and October 23, 2016. Used extensively in developing the principle that evolutionary creatures may become increasingly faithful to the highest spiritual possibilities available at their present stage while complete perfection remains the goal of the ascension career.

Ophelius, through Chris Maurus. “The Only True and Pure Constant in Your Life.” October 15, 2017. Used in discussing the continuing presence of the divine indweller, inward spiritual orientation, and the enduring relationship between the human personality and the Father’s presence.

Uteah, through Chris Maurus. “Augment the Quality of Your Decisions.” May 10, 2020. Used in discussing decision-making, free will, increasing attunement to divine leading, truth, beauty, goodness, soul growth, and the progressive development of the fruits of the spirit.

Beloved One / Thought Adjuster, through Lytske. “The Matter of Eternity.” March 31, 2020. Used in discussing mortal life as the beginning of a much larger ascension career, continuing development after death, the progressive universe journey, and the ultimate destiny of becoming perfect like the Universal Creator.

Source Note

The theological framework of this book is grounded primarily in *The Urantia Book*. The received messages listed above have been used as supplementary material because they provide practical reflections on themes such as free will, Thought Adjuster guidance, spiritual practice, forgiveness, character formation, service, present-moment living, and the progressive journey toward perfection.

Their inclusion should not be understood to mean that these messages form part of *The Urantia Book* or possess the same source status within this manuscript. Where a supplementary message and *The Urantia Book* address similar ideas, *The Urantia Book* remains the primary reference point for the theological and cosmological framework presented here.