

What Unity Teaches About Prayer

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Unity is a movement founded on prayer. While Myrtle Fillmore was attending a lecture she heard the affirmation ‘I am a child of God and do not inherit sickness.’ She took this affirmation into a daily prayer practice and was healed of Tuberculosis. Her husband Charles saw what was happening and started a study in affirmative prayer. Friends began to come to the Fillmore’s for prayer as word spread of their healing and Unity was born. They founded the Society for Silent Help which later became Silent Unity the 24/7 prayer ministry of Unity.

Affirmative prayer is the foundation of Unity. How does Unity pray? What is prayer? Charles Fillmore in *Jesus Christ Heals* writes ‘Prayer is both invocation and affirmation. Meditation, concentration, denial and affirmation in the silence are all forms of what is loosely termed as prayer.’¹ In addition to the Fillmores, many teachers have written on this topic. In this paper we will discover some of the methods and beliefs about prayer from Unity’s co-founders up to modern theologians. While in most Unity settings in the 21st century one will hear God referred to in gender-neutral ways, the early writers of Unity were from a time where God and persons were referred to in masculine terms. When quoting these authors I have kept their terminology, I hope dear reader that you will remember as you read that gender-biased language is mainly a reflection of the time it was written and not of a bias of the writer or Unity.

¹ Charles Fillmore, *Jesus Christ Heals* (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1999), 70.

First let us look at what prayer is not. In the forward of *Teach us to Pray* co-authored by Charles and Cora Fillmore they say prayer is not a begging or supplication, “A prayer without desire in it, a prayer without soul in it, a prayer without Spirit in it is a fruitless prayer.”² In *Christian Healing* Charles Fillmore says, “To pray, believing that the prayer may or may not be answered at the will of God, is to miss the mark... If we pray thinking that we do not deserve the things which we ask, these untrue and indefinite thoughts carry themselves out, and we grow to look upon prayer with doubt and suspicion.”³ From this we can conclude that prayer must have passion and desire but not be begging, that if we are unsure of the ‘answering’ of our prayer then our prayer of uncertain thoughts is answered.

Perhaps May Rowland, director of Silent Unity after Myrtle Fillmore, says it best in her book, *Dare to Believe*, “Unity’s greatest contribution to the field of prayer is its emphasis on the affirmative prayer. It is in contrast to the petition, “O God, give me this, if it be Thy will,” which implies that perhaps God’s will is negative. In Unity we emphasize the prayer of decree or agreement.”⁴ This excerpt from the February 17, 1929 *Daily Word* echoes her sentiment: “I no longer hesitate to pray for supply, because I know that my Father wants me to be rich in the consciousness and in the possession of His blessing’s.”⁵

Some people have been raised with a belief that it’s not acceptable to ask for what one wants or that they are not worthy of receiving. These ideas are not a part of Unity teachings. In fact, Unity teaches of the Christ presence in each person. To fully

² Charles and Cora Fillmore, *Teach us to Pray* (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1941), 4.

³ Charles Fillmore, *Christian Healing* (Unity Village: Unity Books, n.d.), 76-77.

⁴ May Rowland, *Dare to Believe* (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1961), 190.

⁵ *Daily Word* (February 17, 1929)

understand Unity's prayer teachings one must also understand the premise that everyone is 'good enough' to have their prayers answered because they are in essence God. From May Rowland: "Never think of yourself as unworthy. You are the beloved child of God and you can be forgiven, cleansed, and healed through His indwelling Spirit, the Christ Spirit."⁶

Many have taken this idea and missed the next step and that is to not only believe you are worthy but to also take the proper steps to ensure your desired outcome. An often heard story tells of a woman who prayed avidly to win the lottery, she never did and when she arrived in heaven she asked why she hadn't. Her answer was that she had never bought a lottery ticket. We are not saying that buying a lottery ticket is necessarily the answer to a prayer for prosperity but that we do have to do our part. We are responsible for creating a fertile environment. "If you are praying for peace, be peaceful; if you are praying for divine order, be orderly. Remember that prayer changes you. It brings you to a place where you are working with your prayer for its right fulfillment. You are responsible for at least half the answer to your prayer."⁷ May Rowland continues with the advice if a prayer isn't seeming to get results to look at oneself and see if you have stayed in the same groves or attitudes that have caused the problem.⁸

Without changing our attitudes we are doing what Jesus warned against in Matthew 9:17 and pouring new wine in old wineskins.⁹ However the truth student knows that changing our thoughts, beliefs and attitudes often is not as easy as buying new

⁶ Rowland, *Dare to Believe*, 218

⁷ Rowland, *Dare to Believe*, 196

⁸ Rowland, *Dare to Believe*, 196-7

⁹ Matt 9:17

wineskins. One of the most used tools for this changing of thoughts are denials and affirmations.

Charles Fillmore said, “Denial is a putting away of the mental error and an entering into conscious relaxation of both mind and body.”¹⁰ The error he is referring to is a belief that appearances are real. With denials we don’t deny that a situation is happening, such as receiving low marks on a test, but rather we deny the belief that the situation is permanent. We might say, ‘these grades do not define my intelligence.’ Denials can be likened to cleaning out the cluttered closet of your mind. Once you have stated your denial, you move on to the affirmation which is the mindful organizing of the closet in your mind we have just cleaned. Emilie Cady, an early New Thought author whose works are foundational in Unity, says this about affirmations. “To affirm anything is to assert positively that it is so, even in the face of all contrary evidence.”¹¹ Using the earlier situation, we might say ‘I am smart and I think clearly while taking tests resulting in excellent grades.’ This may seem difficult or like a lie at first, but as we remove the clutter of self-doubt and belief in outer appearances we find a belief in ourselves and our unlimited potential.

When using denials and affirmations state the denial clearly and firmly but do not get hooked into it emotionally. Put all your passion and enthusiasm into the affirmation and repeat it as many times as you would like throughout your day. A common ratio is to say the denial once followed by the affirmation three times, though you can certainly say the affirmation more. It is important to continue the process of cleaning out our mental closets of what doesn’t work anymore. Emile Cady use this illustration: “Stagnation is

¹⁰ Fillmore, *Christian Healing* 53

¹¹ H. Emile Cady, *The Complete Works of H. Emilie Cady* (Unity Village: Unity House, 2003), 56.

Death. A pool cannot be kept clean and sweet and renewed unless there is an outlet as well as an inlet. It is our business to keep the outlet open and God's business to keep the stream flowing in and through us."¹²

Another way of clearing any stagnation or mental emotional clutter is through forgiveness. Francis Foulks a beloved Unity minister and author writes, "If any one person feels ill will toward another, holds any unforgiveness in his heart, no matter how great seems the cause for offense, he should cleanse his heart with a "God bless you, I love you and forgive you," She continues by saying to repeat this blessing until it is not just words on your lips but a feeling in your heart."¹³

While holding resentment against anyone we cannot fully enter into a place of oneness with God. Or as Unity Institute instructor Rev. Robert Brumet states, "Forgiveness is letting go of what separates us from the Source."¹⁴ Jesus taught about this as well, saying we must forgive seventy times seven,¹⁵ or in other words, until it is done. This forgiveness is not only for others, when we hold disparaging thoughts about ourselves, condemning ourselves for our choices, we are holding ourselves back from the joy and peace of a lived in communion with Spirit.

Now that we have cleared our thoughts and hearts we can look at prayer itself. One of the methods for praying taught in Unity is the five-step prayer process.

The first step is relaxation. Find a comfortable peaceful place to sit and be still, minimize distractions. If you use the same place for your daily prayer practice, you will gain a muscle memory of this being a holy place and becoming relaxed will become

¹² Cady, *Complete Works*, 86.

¹³ Francis Foulks, *Effectual Prayer* (Unity Village: Unity Books, 2001), 27-28.

¹⁴ Robert Brumet Prayer and Meditation Class notes 10/25/2010

¹⁵ Matt 18:22

easier and easier. If your body has any discomfort it will distract from your practice.

Some find it helpful to take deep cleansing breaths. Others visualize moving through each part of the body becoming relaxed and peaceful.^{16 17 18}

The second step is concentration. We focus our thoughts on a certain idea of Truth. We have spent our lifetimes focusing on untrue thoughts, this is the time to focus on thoughts of health, abundance and communion with God.^{19 20} “We do not concentrate on or hold fast to our holy thoughts in order to change God, for He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow... It is ourself that we seek to change by the holding of holy thoughts. We seek to cleanse ourself of doubts and fears, to build up faith so that we may be made receptive.”²¹

The third step is meditation. This is conscious communion with God where all other thoughts cease and worry and fear are replaced with faith, strength and peace. “By passing through the discipline of intellectual silence, man arrives on the very threshold of God’s workshop, the threshold of Being... God works in the stillness... As man comes into the presence of God...unifying his mind with the mind of God, he is aware only of the soundlessness of God’s word as it weaves itself in and out through the whole soul and body of consciousness, illuminating, redeeming, and restoring him according to his faith and trust.”²²

The fourth step is realization, called by some teachers the silence. In this silence as we have experienced oneness in meditation we move into a realization or

¹⁶ Foulks, *Effectual Prayer*, 45

¹⁷ Paul Hasselbeck, *Metaphysics I*, (Unity Village: Unity House, 2006), 144-5.

¹⁸ “Five-Step Prayer Process” *Unity* (website), accessed November 27, 2010, <http://admin.unityonline.org/prayer/articles/5stepPrayerProcess.html>

¹⁹ Hasselbeck, *Metaphysics I*, 145.

²⁰ Foulks, *Effectual Prayer*, 59-64.

²¹ Foulks, *Effectual Prayer*, 65.

²² Fillmore, *Teach us to Pray*, 24-5.

understanding of the Truth. It is from this place that we pray with others and know with a deep knowing our prayers have been answered.²³ “To a metaphysician realization is the conviction that a person gets when he has persistently concentrated his attention on an idea until he feels assured of the fulfillment of that ideal.”²⁴ There are stories of early Unity healers sitting bedside praying with someone experiencing sickness well into the night until they ‘realized’ the wholeness and health of the person.

The fifth and final step is thanksgiving. We give thanks for our time of communion and for the answering of our prayers, even before we have seen them manifest in the physical realm. “Thanksgiving for good may be likened to the rain that falls upon the ready soil, refreshing vegetation and increasing the productiveness of the soil.”²⁵ Thanksgiving changes us, opens our hearts and minds to see the greatness of what we have and receive further blessings, it has nothing to do with petitioning God as we may have previously heard. As Eric Butterworth says; “it doesn’t make any difference to God whether you give thanks or not. But it makes a lot of difference to you... giving thanks is an important state of your consciousness that keeps you in an awareness of oneness with divine flow.”²⁶

This process is not the only Unity way to pray but is a well known and used method. When practicing it, relax into each step as it might seem mechanical at first. After a while the steps flow easily into each other. While explained here for an individual’s prayer practice, these steps could also be used for spoken prayers.

²³ Hasselbeck, *Metaphysics I*, 146.

²⁴ Fillmore, *Jesus Christ Heals*, 45.

²⁵ Myrtle Fillmore, *How to Let God Help You* (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1994), 155.

²⁶ Eric Butterworth, *Spiritual Economics* (Unity Village: Unity House, 2005), 87.

There has been a lot of publicity about the Law of Attraction and *The Secret* recently. Some people have followed the prescription of *The Secret* and found it to work quite well, while others have not received their desired results. There is truth to the ideas presented in work, and I propose there is more than simply focusing on what you would like to receive. Unity teaches the law of attraction, or what is more commonly called in Unity the law of mind action. The third of the five basic Unity principles is “We create our life experiences through our way of thinking.”²⁷ Charles Fillmore wrote, “There is a chain of mind action connecting cause and effect in all the activities of life. This chain is forged by man, and its links are thoughts, words.”²⁸ This cause and effect relationship is the basis of the law of attraction. In his book *Prosperity*, Charles Fillmore encourages his readers to be persistent and faithful in their work of visualizing that which they desire. In time the ideas will become a part of the subconscious and then begin to be manifest. This process is not one of overnight success but of persistent cleaning out of any thought opposite of what you desire and focus on your goal. He warns: “We must realize all the while however that whatever we put as seed into the subconscious soil will eventually bring forth after its kind... As we sow in mind we reap in manifestation.”²⁹ You may wonder why this is a warning, and the answer is fairly simple. The subconscious mind does not have a switch to know which ideas are to be created and which are to be ignored, the law of cause and effect is equal opportunity. Or as Mr. Fillmore put it, “All happenings are the result of cause and can be explained under the law of cause and

²⁷ “Frequently Asked Questions” *Unity* (website), accessed November 27, 2010, <http://admin.unityonline.org/aboutunity/whoWeAre/faq.html>

²⁸ Fillmore, *Jesus Christ Heals*, 133.

²⁹ Charles Fillmore, *Prosperity*, (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1936), 66-7.

effect.”³⁰ While cause and effect are always happening, our prayer work can help to clarify and ease the process.

If everything is a result of a cause then why do some things we’ve prayed for not happen? And why do ‘bad’ things happen? In *The Dynamic Laws of Prayer* Catherine Ponder answers: “When it seems like your prayers are not being answered, it is usually because there is something *within* you that is blocking the answer...Prayer often has to work amazing results *in* you before it can work amazing results *through* you and *for* you... If you refuse to let prayer work in you, changing you deep within, then you stop prayer from working *for* you.”³¹ As for why ‘bad’ things happen, Paul Hasselback replies: “Sometimes one cannot know if it was his or her own thought or a thought held in collective consciousness having its way. Therefore it would be more useful to *not* ask the question and in prayer and truth see the individual as whole and perfect.”³² Collective consciousness that he refers to is beliefs and understandings that are held by a large portion of the population. For example many people believe there is a cold and flu season every winter. Some people have chosen to not believe this is the truth for them and often stay healthy throughout the season, however they also may find themselves with a cold because there is still an overwhelming consciousness of sickness surrounding them in stores, in advertisements, and in casual conversations. When we find ourselves in a situation that is other than our understanding of wholeness, abundance, etc, instead of looking for where we may have ‘gone wrong’, take the opportunity to renew your focus on the ideal that is appears to be absent.

³⁰ Fillmore, *Prosperity*, 58.

³¹ Catherine Ponder, *The Dynamic Laws of Prayer* (Marina del Ray: DeVorss and Co., 1987), 36.

³² Hasselbeck, *Metaphysics I*, 75.

You may have heard someone say that your thoughts are prayers. In prayer we focus our thoughts on a specific idea, which means those thoughts are prayers, but is every thought? Charles Fillmore says: “Thoughts work themselves out into things.”³³ He doesn’t say ‘when we want them to’. Does this mean the unkind thought you had earlier today will manifest into something unwelcome? Maybe. If you make a habit of unkind thoughts and words, you will probably experience the world to be a much more unkind place than someone who has a habit of thinking and being kind.

Instead of wondering if every thought is a prayer, I suggest striving toward James Dillet Freeman’s definition of praying without ceasing. “We pray without ceasing when we habitually meet whatever comes to us with faith and with love, with a mind to draw from the event all that it has to give, with a willingness to do whatever has to be done to make the most and the best of it.”³⁴ In a conversation with Lynne Brown, who serves as the Vice President over Silent Unity, she said “prayer is what we do all the time. Every thought word and action.” Rev. Brown has spent her life cultivating the attitude her thoughts, words and actions coming from a place of love and faith.

We have learned many things about Unity’s teachings on prayer. Unity is not interested in a prayer of supplication but of affirmation of truth and denial and forgiveness to release untrue ideas. There is a five step prayer method that can be used that consists of: relaxation, concentration, meditation, realization and thanksgiving. The law of attraction is similar to the Unity teaching of the law of mind action which simply put is cause and effect. It may seem like a prayer is not been answered sometimes is because a deep change that is happening within the pray-er. Finally we learned of the

³³ Charles Fillmore, *The Twelve Powers*, (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1999), 129.

³⁴ James Dillet Freeman, *Prayer: the Master Key*, (Unity Village: Unity Books, 1984), 41.

attitude of praying without ceasing, a continual practice of meeting life with faith and love.

And so, we will part dear reader with this last quote from James Dillet Freeman: “Prayer is keeping faith. Prayer is meeting things hard to meet with a confident, hopeful attitude... Both the words and the attitude are prayer.”³⁵

³⁵ Freeman, *Prayer: the Master Key*, 89.

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