

## **Study Group Experiences**

**By: Doug Cable**

*Wandering Urantian:* I am the Wandering Urantian and in my travels since early 2010 I have visited study groups in New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida (a dozen groups here), Louisiana, Texas, and Washington State. I am here to share with you some of my experiences meeting readers and observing the vast differences in the groups.

With me today is Monepitia, a Recorder Seraphim and reporter for the "Jerusem Daily Broadcast Service." She is here to gather a report on the status of study groups on Urantia. She knew this symposium was to happen and asked if she could come and meet all of you. We must always remember that there are countless invisible beings assisting us.

*Reporter:* [addressing the audience] ~~We met on a foggy night in London. [giggle pause]~~ ?? {How about:} Whee whee whee, I am going to enjoy being in this form! {Now you giggle} I have also been allowed to visit you in this form so that I can better interact with you, understand your study groups and report on your progress back to Jerusem and beyond. I bring greetings from far, far away. You may call me Mona. This is a special assignment for me to come to this precious Planet of Michael: The Planet of the Cross and to experience this unique gathering of agondonters from around your little Urantia.

The hosts of celestial beings you come to know from the Urantia Book, share the same quest – to better KNOW God and to better SERVE Him along our long, long journey toward the ages of Light and Life. You are all a very special part of this vast endeavor.

On Jerusem we receive inquiries for news of the World of the Cross, from the Salvington Broadcasts. Sometimes even the big boys on Uversa make an inquiry. As you know from the Urantia Book, with the communications quarantine here I must carry the report through proper channels to offer for Universe broadcast.

*WU:* I had no idea all those beings were interested in us.

*Rep:* You have no concept of how important this planet is; this is Michael's World, Mr. Cable.

You have been blessed with an epochal revelation to help things along, here on the "world of the cross".

*WU:* Yes, this revelation is called The Urantia Book after the official name for our planet.

*Rep:* Please tell us how YOU SEE this revelation being used?

*WU:* It has been translated into more than fifteen languages, and distributed widely. We also have many study groups throughout the world that are dedicated to a greater understanding of this revelation.

*Rep:* Another group of seraphim, the Social Architects, work with such groups, assisting them to become more efficient. Tell me about these study groups on Urantia.

*WU:* These groups are for studying the epochal revelation, learning about God and His presence in our lives. In these study groups we learn that we are all brothers and sisters under the Fatherhood of God.

*Rep:* How do the study groups work to accomplish that?

*WU:* That is in this revelation, *The Urantia Book*. One thing that is important for these study groups is for the leader to maintain some control over the meeting, being certain that everyone is involved and also that nobody talks too long about extraneous subjects. That way we can better focus on studying this revelation. These are Urantia Book study groups and this book and its application to our daily lives needs to be the focus of the discussion.

*Rep:* In your introduction you mentioned a lot of places where you have visited these groups. These are names of states in your country, the United States. How did you come to travel the states visiting these groups?

*WU:* I used to have a real job but on April Fool's Day 2009 they suddenly retired me; now I call that day my Liberation Day. I quickly sold my house, bought a camper and hit the road, visiting study groups.

*Rep:* A camper? [Leading you to expand on this – not because she doesn't know what it is.]

*WU:* It is a type of house on wheels that is called a fifth wheel; I pull it with a truck and move it from place to place, generally parking it in an area where there is a study group.

*Rep:* Do you live in this camper?

*WU:* Yes, I live in it all the time.

*Rep:* Where do you put it?

*WU:* In the summertime I park it in New York State, not far from Lake Erie; in the winter I park in Dade City Florida, northeast of Tampa. I stop in South Carolina for a month or so twice a year and generally visit the Smoky Mountains as well as other interesting places along the way. I park for a while at a campground then drive the truck to study group meetings. One campground in Florida I parked in had a Mardi Gras parade that went past all the campers seated on chairs in front of their campsites; golf carts were decorated up fancy and people wearing costumes rode in them throwing out beads and candy.

*Rep:* Sounds as if these campgrounds are fun places.

*WU:* They certainly can be. Wherever I am parked I also go to state parks and wildlife sanctuaries to enjoy nature and take photographs. After exploring one region I move on to another. I write a blog about my travels called "The Wandering Urantian," I always include a couple of quotes from *The Urantia Book* and a few of my photographs.

*Rep:* Has there been any problems during your travels?

*WU:* Just a few. Last year I had three tires blow out on my camper; fortunately they happened one at a time and nothing bad happened. It truly helps that our unseen friends are with us in such emergencies.

*Rep:* You would not believe some of the stories I have heard about their devotion, but you need to get to the mansion worlds before we can share those. So, you mostly visit these groups in the eastern US?

*WU:* Yes, I drive my camper up and down the east coast visiting study groups and I have met many new Urantia brothers and sisters. We have become close friends whom I love very much.

*Rep:* What do you bring to these groups?

*WU:* I tell them about other study groups I have visited and something about how they operate. I try to help them feel that they are part of our larger community. And as a

matter of fact, my travels inspired me to develop some booklets that I distribute to the groups. The first one, "The Pronouncement," summarizes for nonreaders the true gospel of Jesus as presented in *The Urantia Book*. There are also two in a proposed series of three describing the faith of Jesus; the first describes how his faith grew as he matured and a second describes his private teachings around the Mediterranean Sea before his later public teachings. There will be a third summarizing his mature faith. I would be most happy to give you a copy of the ones I have.

*Rep:* In what type places to these groups meet?

*WU:* All kinds of places; sometimes it is in somebody's home; sometimes in a library, or in my camper. One in the Florida Panhandle meets in an office in a bank building and another in the panhandle meets in a spiritual building called the Capstone House.

*Rep:* That is a diverse mix of venues. I like that. [Making notes]

*WU:* This small building, the Capstone House, has Reiki Healing, meditation classes, a library with lots of spiritual books as well as a regular Urantia study group. Another interesting small group meets in a lovely Tea House near the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana. One wall in this quaint shop that may be about fifteen feet square is covered with countless containers of many kinds of tea. We each make a small pot of tea to enjoy during the meeting. This group has two long time readers who have interesting discussions. Another excellent group currently meets in a Panera Bread restaurant but they hope to soon use a college classroom for their meetings.

*Rep:* How can the members get to know the other people who attend these groups?

*WU:* That is a good question. The groups are all very different but the best groups offer a social time. Many groups have a light snack before or after the meeting. A group in Florida meets on Sunday afternoons; they have a worship segment, pot-luck lunch and a study group session. They also have a meditation period in their beautiful back yard. My group in South Carolina meets on Sunday evenings at a nearby restaurant for a meal before our meeting in my camper. One group has its meetings at a library for a couple of hours then goes down the street to a Pizza place for pizza and beer for a couple more hours. These social aspects are important and allow the members to bond and discuss other topics without interfering with the meeting.

*Rep:* How do these groups study this book; do you just start at the beginning?? How do you ever get through it?

*WU:* That depends on the group. To get a broad spiritual perspective we should start at the beginning but some prefer to start someplace else, with the life of Jesus for example. If the members are more experienced it is best to start at the beginning. With those who are new the other way may be better. It generally takes about 5 years for a group to get through it. Some are quicker. Some take longer. One group leader was careful to explain every difficult topic and they might read only a few paragraphs in a two hour meeting. The important thing is to understand what is being studied and share this understanding with those at the meeting.

*Rep:* Do these groups ever change?

*WU:* Certainly, groups grow and change; sometimes they get too big and need to split up. It is important for group leaders to persevere because the size of these groups will wax and wane; they must not get discouraged if membership falls.

*Rep:* How do your groups find new members?

*WU:* That is sometimes difficult; generally each member tries to find people who are interested in learning the truth.

*Rep:* Why don't you just stand on the street corners and shout, like selling newspapers - or sell them from the trunk of your car?

*WU:* It does not work that way Mona; people must want to learn these truths. There is an excellent quotation on page 1726 paragraph two of *The Urantia Book* that explains it very well. In this passage Jesus, Michael, states that if we truly live these teachings, manifest the fruits of the spirit, then people will seek after us so they can gain what we have acquired. {With emphasis and spacing} *The extent to which you have to go with your message to the people is, in a way, the measure of your failure to live the whole or righteous life, the truth-co-ordinated life.* That is an exact quotation.

*Rep:* Do you live these teachings?

*WU:* We certainly try.

*Rep:* As preparation before coming here I did a bit of studying myself; I read the document called "The Publication Mandate." It states that "thousands of study groups must be brought into existence." If you really do live these teachings as you say, then where are all those people who want to hear your message, where are your thousands of study groups?

*WU:* {Significant pause} Each of us must get better at living these teachings. {Shorter pause} There is a story about a certain rich man who asked Jesus what he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven; Jesus replied that he first must go and sell all that he has. The rich man went away unhappy because he did not want to part with his wealth. The commentary about this story says that the problem was not the wealth but his priorities. If he had agreed to part with his wealth most likely he would have been given control of it, only now it would be dedicated toward doing God's will.

And so must each of us determine our own priorities. If we place God's will securely first in our lives then we *will* manifest the fruits of the spirit and people *will* be drawn to our lives to learn more about these teachings that so motivate us. If instead we place materialistic considerations ahead of this message we will continue to struggle to find new students of this revelation.

As long as we fail to fully live these teachings we will continue to fail to gain more students of this revelation. We live these teachings by dedicating our lives totally to doing God's will, to live in service for our brothers and sisters.

*Rep:* Tell me, why do you attend these study groups? I mean why should anybody want to attend one of these meetings?

*WU:* To study *The Urantia Book*.

*Rep:* But you can do that at home. Why bother putting on clothes and go to some strange place and talk with people you do not know just for that? {Emphasis} Why do you attend study group meetings?

*WU:* The real reason is to grow spiritually; we want to learn more about God and His creation, about how everything fits together. By interacting with other students of this revelation we obtain a wider perspective. It is this sharing of insights from our Urantian brothers and sisters that helps us to grow.

*Rep:* What is the atmosphere like in these groups? How does it feel to be in these meetings?

*WU:* It naturally varies, some groups are vibrant, alive and there is a meaningful exchange of ideas. You are aware of a real spiritual joy while interacting with these sincere students of this revelation. However there are some that just go through the motions, sort of like they were reading a grocery list.

*Rep:* Exactly what do most groups do during their meetings, just what happens?

*WU:* Once their meeting starts they read from the Book; most groups read one paper during the meeting, taking turns around the group. With some groups more effort is placed on getting the pronunciation right than about what the deeper meaning might be. The leader should prepare a list of questions or discussion points for the paper before the meeting to bring about a better dialog among the group members. These discussions and interactions are a very important component of the study group experience.

*Rep:* What can be done to enhance this study group experience?

*WU:* Wow! I never thought about that. {Pause} One way to improve this experience would be to have a prayer or a worship segment before or after the meeting, this would set a more spiritual atmosphere.

*Rep:* That is correct, for example there is a quote in *The Urantia Book* on page 998, paragraph 5 that states:

*Group or congregational praying is very effective in that it is highly socializing in its repercussions. When a group engages in community prayer for moral enhancement and spiritual uplift, such devotions are reactive upon the individuals composing the group; they are all made better because of participation.*

*WU:* Yes, the social period helps the members to bond and get to know each other but this does not encourage spiritual growth. Encouraging individual spiritual growth would enhance the study group experience by assisting the members in their own spiritual quest.

*Rep:* How can that be done? Just how can these groups encourage spiritual growth?

*WU:* I think there is a clue in the booklet I am currently writing, it is titled "Mature Faith - The Faith of Jesus Part 3." The first section of this booklet is "What is Faith?" In it I point out that according to *The Urantia Book*, faith denotes a personal relationship between the individual and God. True faith is not a system of codified teachings, a belief system, but rather what the individual has actually experienced; it is an actual experience with God.

*Rep:* That is true, but what does that have to do with study groups?

*WU:* Please bear with me a moment. As previously stated, spiritual growth should be an important outcome of study group meetings. If all you wish to do is read the book then there is no need for meetings. Investigating and enhancing faith could assist in this growth. The fact that somebody takes the time to attend one of these study groups indicates that they believe this revelation and that this is their belief system.

It becomes their faith when they act upon it, when they make decisions based upon this belief. One important way to enhance the study group experience would be for these groups to assist in this transformation from belief into true faith.

*Rep:* How would they do this? Please expand on it.

*WU:* I point out in the booklet that there are seven statements that characterize this transformation from belief into faith. These are: 1. The individual accepts *The Urantia Book* teachings as a belief system. 2. The individual makes a heartfelt decision to follow this belief system. 3. The individual is deeply sincere; this is the key to the entire transformation, sincerity. 4. The promptings to perform a certain act appear from the unconscious region of the mind, the individual must decide if each is acceptable and act accordingly. 5. The individual begins to cooperate with the Thought Adjuster but this is an unconscious process. 6. Each decision acted upon that is in harmony with God's will, brings the individual closer to true faith. 7. Even difficult decisions are bravely accepted and acted upon, knowing that God will assist us in completing the task. An example of such a difficult decision was when I agreed to appear before all these good Urantians and talk about study groups. I have never before spoken to such a large group, but I know He will assist me. With Him on our side true failure is not possible.

*Rep:* How would this work in practice with your study groups?

*WU:* That would depend on the group, but one way would be for the group to allocate some time at each meeting to discuss one of these points. They might talk about how to identify these decisions and learn to act on them instinctively. Recall that Jesus repeatedly rehearsed the apostles on dealing with disappointments so that when the real test came they instinctively acted courageously. Also, if members have stories to share or want to ask for help with some aspect of this process, they should be encouraged to do so either to the group or on an individual basis.

*Rep:* How would this work for new readers and groups with many new readers?

*WU:* I do not feel that would be much of a problem. First, this process does not require extensive knowledge of the revelation for implementation because it is a faith enhancing process. Also, even with a group having many long time readers there will naturally be a wide difference in spiritual progress. Those who are farther along the growth path should help the others and this assistance is definitely beneficial to all present.

Another consideration is there may be some who will be uncomfortable with this discussion and their viewpoints must certainly be considered.

*Rep:* You mentioned previously about faith being a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. Do you have such a relationship? When did you become aware of it?

*WU:* Yes, it became most noticeable a couple of years ago. I have a certain routine I do every morning.

*Rep:* What sort of routine?

*WU:* First I do a series of exercises, yoga and traditional, then follow with prayer and a brief meditation. One morning just as I finished the prayer it felt as if I were surrounded by light. My eyes were closed and it was a cloudy day outside but suddenly I seemed to be in light. After this experience my character appeared to change; for example later that day I was driving down the road when a car pulled right in front of me and I had to break suddenly. What surprised me the most, it actually shocked me, was my lack of reaction; previously there would have been some really choice words spoken or thought but now there was only a quiet dealing with the situation. Since then a few people have remarked that they have observed a positive change in me.

*Rep:* How would you correlate that experience with study groups?

*WU:* I believe that study groups should not stand in isolation; they are part of our total spiritual growth. Study groups are the first component of our spiritual growth, a personal prayer and meditation session is the second part and the final item is a constant hunger and thirst after righteousness. By the way I have a video on YouTube titled "The Urantia Book and Perfection Hunger."

*Rep:* So study groups are only one part of your striving for spiritual growth?

*WU:* Absolutely, for well-rounded spiritual growth we need personal time to think and grow.

*Rep:* Getting back to new members, what if the group does get a new reader who wants to study the book but has trouble with these new concepts?

*WU:* Then the leader may assign somebody to be available to answer the new reader's questions whenever necessary; sort of like a buddy system. We want to encourage anyone who is interested and is seeking for Truth.

*Rep:* So, what else does the group leader do?

*WU:* The leader is really there to facilitate the flow of study. This facilitator holds control over the meeting, explaining terms that may not be understood and tries to keep the discussion on topic without any long rants. I know one group leader who is good at this. One time she was asked if *The Urantia Book* discusses reincarnation, she said, "Yes" and went on without discussion. Some in the group were new readers who believed in reincarnation and she didn't want to get bogged down on that topic. It is important for the leader to know the members of the group, to have some idea who they are and generally their viewpoint.

*Rep:* Proper leadership is important in most activities.

*WU:* The facilitator can set the tone for the entire group. The best ones seem to be able to direct the group quietly and with understanding. On the other hand, I know one leader who insisted the meeting had to be exactly two hours; towards the end of the meeting every few minutes somebody would ask if the time was up. Inflexible rules do not promote understanding exchanges. Certainly the group must have some rules to maintain an orderly meeting, but the leader needs to exercise wisdom in conducting the meeting.

*Rep:* What is the most important thing for a good study group to have?

*WU:* Somebody who asks good questions. That improves the exchange of ideas and information that is one of the main purposes of the meeting. Such cross fertilization stimulates and expands our spiritual perception. As we stated previously, one way to do this would be for the leader to prepare, before the meeting, a list of questions and discussion points covering the text to be studied.

*Rep:* Expanding your spiritual perception is vital.

*WU:* It is also very important for study group leaders to register their group on the study group portal, that way others who are interested can find them. In my own travels, that is the main way I find new groups to visit; just last fall I found a good group in the Philadelphia area this way and this year I found an excellent group in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The group leader should check this portal occasionally to see what other groups may be in their area, or if they are planning a vacation in some part of the country or even abroad they might check that area for groups to visit while they are there.

*Rep:* Do you enjoy meeting with these new groups?

*WU:* Very much. Each group is unique and it is a joy to observe how each group interacts and conducts itself. This Charlotte group is mainly black and has young members who are involved in the discussions. They start and end their meeting with a prayer. The week before I attended their meeting they did community service at a food bank, one of the young members reported to the group on how satisfying the experience was to him. This is an example of manifesting the fruits of the spirit; it is what we should all be about. My "house on wheels" was parked near Asheville, about a two hour drive away; after the meeting, all the way back to Asheville I was bubbling over with spiritual joy so strongly that it was difficult to concentrate on the driving. At one point I had to exit the road I was on to see where I was, I had forgotten what road I was on this joy was so strong. These are great experiences and I look forward to more of them.

*Rep:* That is what this experience should be like, but what can be done when a study group stops discussing and merely reads the book over and over?

*WU:* There are several ways to handle it when a study group stops discussing and merely reads the book over and over. One way to generate more involvement is for advanced study groups to study one topic in various parts of the book, such as the Thought Adjusters, Adam and Eve, the nature of God or the Lucifer Rebellion.

*Rep:* That sounds productive.

*WU:* Another way to encourage studying instead of reading would be for a few study groups in some area to periodically plan a mini conference; each group would be responsible for a portion of the conference and would study one particular topic for presentation. They would also participate and benefit from the other presentations. I have been to a couple of these regional conferences and found them to be enjoyable and satisfying. One had a communion ceremony complete with the singing of hymns; all the way back home I was singing these hymns. There is true spiritual joy at these meetings.

*Rep:* Sounds like a good way to meet other readers.

WU: It certainly is. I recently visited a study group that employed a different technique for encouraging studying instead of simple reading. They announced the paper in advance, participants were asked to read the paper before the meeting and each section of the paper was assigned to one person for discussion. During the meeting the paper was not read at all except for isolated passages, leaving the time for sharing the ideas and concepts mentioned in the paper. While this may be difficult for a group with a lot of new readers, it is a powerful technique for freeing up time for an exchange of ideas instead of reading words that everyone has in front of them anyway.

Rep: There is a clue to the future path of study groups in "The Publication Mandate." It states that this revelation has been given to us so that leaders and teachers will be ready for the coming age, which will be more spiritual in nature. It also says "*The future is not open to your mortal comprehension, but you will do well to diligently study the order, plan, and methods of progression as they were enacted in the earth life of Jesus when the Word was made flesh. You are becoming actors in an ensuing episode when the Word is made Book.*"

These study groups are the incubators for our future spiritual teachers and leaders and they are vital to the spreading of the good news of the true gospel of Jesus.

WU: This quotation from "The Publication Mandate" brings up an important point. We are living in an "episode when the Word is made Book" and we may lose sight of this truth from time to time. For us Urantians living in these times *The Urantia Book* is just as vital to us as was the bestowal of Michael to our predecessors two thousand years ago. It is imperative that we manifest the fruits of the spirit.

Rep: This mandate has instructed you to bring into existence thousands of study groups. The only way that can happen is for the study group experience to be uplifting, joyous and fulfilling.

WU: Yes the future of this entire movement resides in our having healthy, vibrant study groups where our understanding and application of these truths can grow and prosper.

Rep: I hope you do realize just how important these study groups really are. [Addressing the audience] These study groups are the vanguard of the struggle to win this world back for Michael. You need to so live your lives that you fully manifest the fruits of the spirit; to be so fully in the spirit that your brothers and sisters in spiritual darkness will be moved to ask what it is that so motivates your lives and then you

will be able to spread the good news of the true gospel of Jesus: Fatherhood with God, Brotherhood with man and ever ascending citizenship in the eternal universe. This struggle takes place one soul at a time. Relax. You have a lot of work to do. We need to see some real life in these study groups.

*WU:* That was well said, thank you.

*Rep:* Do you have anything more to add?

*WU:* How can we as students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation ever hope to spread the good news contained in this transformative epistle if we sit in study groups like little mice and without any feeling read these soul saving words as if they were a catechism! More than once at a *Urantia Book* conference I have heard that gathering *Urantia Book* readers is like herding cats; in our study groups us Urantian cats need to *educate* the rote reading mice and truly study this revelation that has been granted to us.

*Rep:* I guess we just need to all work together to learn as much as we can and to share that with our brothers and sisters.

*WU:* {Rep. starts picking up and preparing to leave.} In summary study groups should:

*[[ Overhead projector ]]*

Have an effective leader who maintains control  
Stay on topic and involve everyone  
Have a social period before or after the meeting  
Have a prayer or worship segment  
Where to start reading depends on group  
Live the teachings in order to attract new readers  
Allocate some time to discuss the transformation from belief to true faith  
Have a buddy system for new readers  
Prepare questions and discussion points in advance  
Register on Study Group Portal  
Engage in community service projects  
Conduct regional mini conferences  
Announce the paper beforehand, assigning each section to one person for discussion  
Fight reading-groupism at all cost  
Please add your own! This is just a beginning.

*Rep:* Thank you, Mr. Cable, for your time. It is time for me to return to Jerusem, farewell and each one of you and please take these lessons back to your own study groups; we need to see real spiritual growth on this "World of the Cross." Please remember that is One and One and One who make a crowd. I appreciate the experience of meeting you and sharing this experience of connecting with the Divine Spirit.

*Both or either: Thank you and "have a great journey."*

35 minutes