



CHRISTIAN SCIENCE Sentinel

"What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." — JESUS

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How can I find a feeling of purpose?

By JOHN BIGGS

Q: *How can I find a feeling of purpose when nothing's going on?*

A: I understand the way you're feeling. Once, I was visiting family on a farm in South Africa—far away from home. It was beautiful there, but I started to feel adrift after a couple weeks, because I just wasn't sure what else to do besides walk around the farm. I tried helping out with some of the day-to-day work, but it was clear I wasn't really needed. I wanted to feel valuable and purposeful, but I just wasn't getting that.

One thing I was able to do during this time was a project I'd created for myself, which involved reading through all of Mary Baker Eddy's published writings other than *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. As I read, I came across this passage: "As an active portion of one stupendous whole, goodness identifies man with universal good. Thus may each member of this church rise above the oft-repeated inquiry, What am I? to the scientific response: I am able to impart truth, health, and happiness, and this is my rock of salvation and my reason for existing" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 165). This really struck me, because I saw that the capacity to be of service—to be and do good—wasn't tied to any outward circumstances. Instead, good is the core of what each of us really is as God's image and likeness.

As I continued to pray about my purpose during this trip, I realized I could

stop trying so hard to create purpose for myself. I also didn't have to ask God to give me purpose. All I needed to do was open my eyes to the opportunities "to impart truth, health, and happiness" that had already been given to me. I knew these opportunities had to be present, because if God created us to be and do good, then our goodness must always be useful and needed—in some way and wherever we are. The goodness and the opportunity to express that goodness go hand in hand.

As I prayed this way, it occurred to me that instead of going back to my cousin or uncle—the managers and owners of

the farm—to try and find something to do, I could ask my aunt. She knew of my love for horses and immediately connected me with a local instructor who was teaching horseback riding to children with developmental disabilities. This turned out to be a perfect fit for all of us. I was able to be of real service as a helper, walking with the children as they learned to ride. And I was so blessed to feel their love, expressed in their smiles and in gratitude for their progress.

This experience helped me see that my purpose was already divinely established—was mine always, regardless of circumstances—and that with that purpose came the avenues to express it. The turning point came when I stopped hoping for an opportunity "someday" and instead listened to God to be guided to the opportunity that I had already been given and that was already present.

My purpose was already divinely established, and with that purpose came the avenues to express it.

The existence of our innate purpose doesn't have anything to do with what is or isn't going on around us. Instead, an awareness of our God-given purpose allows us to see all the ways we can show how good God is—right here, right now.

As an individualized expression of divine good, your purpose is certainly included in who you are. And no matter where you are or what's going on in the world, God will show you how you can live that today. ●



BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF

Originally published in the July 6, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

Thinking about suicide?

By VALERIE MINARD

I was panicking. It was almost the end of my freshman year of college, and I had no idea how I was going to pay for the next year's tuition. Because of a bad business deal, my parents had lost their savings, and it seemed like all the existing financial resources had been tapped. Walking across campus that day, I felt as though I couldn't see any solution or future for me.

I was in a dark mental place with no one to turn to for support or encouragement. The temptation to give in to self-destructive thoughts—to “escape”—was strong.

These thoughts, however, were new to me. Up until then, I'd had dreams of making a good future for myself. But now it seemed like all my plans had reached a dead end. What was the point of living?

Growing up, I'd developed a habit of praying about my problems. So, through the fog of self-pity, my thoughts naturally started reaching out to God for comfort and guidance. And there, right in that moment of hopelessness, all the things I'd learned during my years as a student in the Christian Science Sunday School kicked in. The ideas that saved me went along these lines:

“Valerie, death is not a friend. It can't provide a solution, because God is the source of all answers and is present now and always will be. God is good, and He made you with all the qualities and spiritual resources you need, no matter what the external circumstances seem to be. Your creator has not forsaken you.

“These negative thoughts are not your thoughts. The ideas God gives you are good. Destructive thoughts are not good. They are lies trying to undermine your sense of your worth and purpose, and you don't need to listen to them. The Bible says, “For I know what I have planned for you,” says the Lord. “I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, New English Translation).”

I'd had enough experiences by then to know that if I trusted God, there would be a solution. But if I gave in to the negative thoughts, I would be distracted and miss the blessing.

“Valerie, heaven is not a place you have to die to get into so that things will get better. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven, all God's goodness, is within you—within consciousness. So what you need isn't a change in circumstances but a change in the way you're thinking

about them—moving from a limited perspective of things to seeing them more the way God does.” This wasn't positive thinking, but was about getting a clearer understanding of my relation to God, who is always caring for me.

With those powerful ideas, the mental storm subsided. The dark thoughts began to disappear as I felt a deepening trust that there would be an answer, even though I didn't know what it would be. I no longer felt forsaken or at risk; God had rescued me.

This peace stayed with me, and it turned out that even without my family's

*I no longer felt
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rescued me.*



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help, I was able to find new funds to pay tuition for my remaining three years of college. Later, when I went to graduate school, a research assistantship paid for all my expenses.

There may be times in our lives when things look very bleak. But right in the

middle of the turmoil, divine help is at hand to lift you up from the pit. God is ever present to rescue and deliver you—and to bring you out of the dark, destructive thoughts into the light of hope, promise, and peace. ●

Originally published in the July 20, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

How I prayed when quarantine hit

By DEVON SWINBURNE

March 14, 2020. The Spanish government declared a state of emergency: a quarantine, with a very strict set of rules. All schools, businesses, and public areas were closed. Citizens could leave their homes only for groceries or to go to the pharmacy, and no one was allowed to travel more than two hundred meters. A heavy police presence descended on the city of Cadiz, where I've been living, and if you were found doing outdoor activities other than the approved ones, you could receive a fine of five hundred to two thousand Euros.

On a normal day of living and working in the south of Spain as an English teacher at a high school, I'd spend the whole day outside of my apartment. On any given afternoon, I was used to seeing streets filled with people, bustling courtyards, and open-air markets packed with

locals doing their daily shopping. Days here start slowly but last until the late hours, with people meeting friends, eating at cafes, and walking by the ocean well after sunset. I had never seen a street in Cadiz even close to empty before March, and when quarantine began, I felt anxious and unaccustomed to being locked inside all day.

The level of fear was high. My roommate is very up to date on the news and would share daily statistics of infections and deaths. Other coworkers reached out in fear, asking advice on whether to stay in Spain or flee back to the United States. Very quickly I found myself feeling unsure, as well as overwhelmed by the fact that if I stayed, I didn't know when I'd be able to go home. The US government released a statement saying that if citizens didn't return home



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immediately, they wouldn't be able to for an "indefinite" amount of time. Yet I didn't want to abandon my teaching position (which I had finished online), or the city and friends I had grown to love.

I had been raised to turn to God in prayer for help, for guidance, for overcoming challenges, and for healing. I always have. I've traveled around the world and been in many time zones, climates, cultures, and countries, and have always found solace and support from God and from the understanding of God I've gained through Christian Science.

So when my mom suggested I call a Christian Science practitioner for help in dealing with the fear I was feeling, I was eager to.

That evening on the phone, after I explained my situation, the practitioner reminded me of some of the basic facts I'd learned in the Christian Science Sunday School: Each of us is always embraced in God's almighty, protective love. No disease, facts, or numbers could change my forever oneness with God. And God's law—the law of good, harmony, and health—was the true law governing me.

Coming to the realization that there was nothing that could come between God and any of God's children, regardless of location or situation, lifted the fear. I felt safe in the understanding that even if I was geographically far from family, I was never truly alone, because as a child of God, I am never separated from the divine Love that is my Life. I was able to go to bed peacefully, free of any worry.

I can happily say that during the months I was in quarantine, I never had a return of those feelings of fear or doubt. Even when concerned friends from back home asked me if I was afraid to stay or was feeling trapped or alone, I remained at peace. I know this is because in that breakthrough moment, I was completely willing to sacrifice what the five physical senses were telling me about the situation for what God, Truth, was telling me. And what Truth was telling me was that no disease, no outbreak, no dangerous location could ever separate me from God. I was in His loving arms, being protected and cared for. That's when the fear dissolved.

This wonderful feeling of peace even helped my roommate, who was effortlessly able to give up his obsessive checking of the news and numbers. This brought a permanent lightness to our household.

One of my biggest take-aways from this healing was the recognition that my safety doesn't come from a physical location called home, but from God. I have often worked with the psalm in the Bible that says, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalms 139:7–10). This specific idea of God as my home and refuge is one that I carry with me closely. And I know even more deeply now that I am *always* at home in God—at every moment and in every situation. ●

Originally published in the August 3, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

How I stopped fighting with my sister

By MARILYN WICKSTROM

My sister and I did not get along. She was messy while I was neat. We didn't share the same interests and couldn't relate to each other. It seemed like all we did was argue and fight.

One day, when I went to get a skirt I wanted to wear, I found it in a crumpled heap on the floor of my closet. My sister had dumped it there after wearing it. She hadn't even asked me if she could wear it, and then when she'd finally returned it, she hadn't even bothered to hang it up. For me, the neatnik, this was beyond insulting.

Furious, I grabbed the skirt off the floor and headed to the ironing board in the basement. Frustration and anger welled up inside me. I didn't like my sister, but even worse was an unfamiliar feeling: I realized in that moment that I also didn't like myself and the way I was thinking.

As a student in the Christian Science Sunday School, I'd learned the importance of Jesus' teachings, including forgiveness and the demand to love. But Jesus did more than simply tell his followers that they should forgive and love. He showed them why and how they could: Each of us is the child of God, divine Love, so the ability to love is included in who we are.

I certainly didn't feel very loving at that moment. I felt totally justified in my anger and in all the negative thoughts about my sister that were swirling through my head. And yet, as I stood

there alone in the basement, something inside me changed. A beautiful peaceful feeling spread over me. Looking back, I know that moment was answered prayer, because beneath the anger and frustration was a real desire to love my sister and to live as the child of Love that I knew God had created me to be.

From that moment on, my relationship with my sister was different. I felt genuine love for her.

The ugly feelings vanished. I had a clear recognition that I could be the forgiving, love-filled person I wanted to be because that was the identity God had given me. How my sister was acting couldn't change the fact that I reflected Love. That was so freeing.

From that moment on, my relationship with my sister was different. I felt



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genuine love for her, and a sweet sense of my own purity and gentleness filled my heart. We actually never had another argument, and we even became very good friends.

What happened? I learned that day in the basement that my happiness, peace, and ability to love aren't dependent on how others act. That's not to say that others' bad behavior is OK or that we should simply put up with it. But I did discover that all the good that we are is dependent on God alone, and when we recognize this, we can feel joy and contentment no matter what. I discovered that love is a gift from God. It is ours and can never be taken away. The expression

of Love is what we are and what we will always be.

This turning point in my relationship with my sister was huge. But even bigger was the foundation this experience laid for my whole life. I came to see that anger, hurt feelings, and self-pity don't have the payoff they seem to promise. In fact, all they do is obscure the loved and loving spiritual identity that is ours as children of God. By contrast, turning to God and listening to God in the harder moments enables us to see the good in everyone more readily and more completely. And this in turn opens the door to the power of Love, which restores us and heals our relationships. ●

Originally published in the August 17, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

In Your house securely dwelling,
Where Your children live to bless,
Seeing only Your creation,
We can share Your happiness,
Share Your joy and spend it freely.
Loyal hearts can feel no fear;
We Your children know You, Father,
Love and Life forever near.

—Elizabeth C. Adams

Christian Science Hymnal: Hymns 430–603, No. 474, © CSBD

How do you think about your rivals?

By SOLIANA DOUTRICH

We were a week out from a soccer tournament against our biggest rivals when the trash-talking started. My teammates kept going on about how much we hated our rival team and the awful things they'd done. We'd definitely had some negative encounters with this team during past games, but to be honest, it seemed like my teammates were mostly using the trash talk to hype all of us up before the big match.

In the Christian Science Sunday School, I'd learned the value of filtering out negative thoughts so you can hear the good, healing thoughts from God more clearly. And at first, I was able to keep the impression that the other players were aggressive and mean out of my head. However, as I got closer to the game, I had a harder time blocking out these thoughts. This is when everything started to go downhill.

The game against our rivals was very messy. While I was playing, I found myself looking for the negative qualities in the other players, and it ended up being a dirty game in which both sides were more focused on irritating the other team than on playing the beautiful sport we all loved. Not only did my teammates and I forget our reason for being there, but we also lost the game.

The next day we regrouped. After playing a series of other teams, we began to gel again and to feel more like the team we wanted to be. We even talked about the previous day's game and how those negative thoughts hadn't helped

us, but had actually thwarted our ability to play our best.

When finals rolled around, it was clear that we would be going up against our rivals again. While I did feel nervous, this time I knew what needed to happen. I was not going to allow those unkind, unspiritual thoughts to barge in and take over. I prayed for myself and everyone in the tournament by knowing that God was there with all of us—including the other team. I knew that because God is All and we are each the expression of God, we all must express God's qualities and nothing else. I was able to identify some of these qualities, like persistence, commitment, respect, and love. I could see how both teams were embodying these qualities; we couldn't have made it this far without them.

I used Jesus' parable of the tares and the wheat as inspiration (see Matthew 13:24–30). In the story, the tares are weeds that look almost identical to wheat, but unlike wheat, are a big nuisance. In our soccer game, the “tares” were the negative thoughts about the other players that might seem true but could never actually be true because they weren't based in God. Only the “wheat” thoughts—the thoughts about each player's goodness—could be true. By throwing out the thought-tares, I made more room for good thoughts, and for harmony.

The game started off on a positive note. And throughout the game, I actively looked for evidence of God in everything that happened on the field.

I found myself looking for the negative qualities in the other players, and it ended up being a dirty game.

I made an effort to exchange some quick, kind words, or a high five, with someone from the other team. These things may sound small, but they really helped remind me that there was no one playing soccer that day who wasn't an expression of God. My mentality had changed completely, and as a result, the feeling on the field was different, too—and more constructive.

While the match didn't go perfectly smoothly, it really turned out to be a beautiful game of soccer. I also noticed that I

I actively looked for evidence of God in everything that happened on the field.

didn't feel like I was lacking energy, even though this was our sixth game in a row and was one of the most intense games I'd ever played. In the end, I was able to score, and my team went on to win the game in overtime with a final score of 3 to 2.

The bigger win was the complete change in perspective that I had, and that my whole team ended up having, which allowed us to honor God, as well as the other players' God-given gifts and abilities and our own. ●

Originally published in the August 24, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.



BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF

How to make a difficult decision

By GRANT CLIFFORD

I was not doing well in school. During my freshman and sophomore years, my grades were low, reflecting my lack of care for my schoolwork and classes. By the end of sophomore year, I knew I had to make a change, because my current school environment just wasn't working for me. But how do you make a decision that could change your life forever?

I had a few options, including another public high school nearby and a private boarding school really far away. I had the whole summer, which I spent at a camp for Christian Scientists, to decide where I would be for my junior and senior years.

I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. At first I tried to make the decision by gathering information. I talked to people who attended the boarding school I was considering, and they all said good things. In fact, everyone, including my parents, thought this school would be a really good fit, but I was still unsure.

The whole decision seemed so stressful and impossible, and I was worried about making the wrong choice. But one day, I talked to one of my camp counselors about it, and he suggested that I turn to God for guidance. Initially I was a little reluctant, because even though I had learned in the Christian Science Sunday School that God is both all-knowing and all-loving, I had never actually turned to God for help in this way.

I felt that I had to make this decision on my own. That nobody else could make it for me—not even God! Finally,

though, with a little encouragement from my counselor, I opened up the Bible at random and immediately saw this verse from Psalms: “Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (5:8).

I was amazed by how perfectly this verse addressed my situation! Feeling a little more confident about leaning on God, I began praying with and thinking more deeply about this verse. The last part really stood out to me. It helped me

realize that I didn't have to worry about taking a misstep, because God was putting the right decision clearly in front of me. He would make the way “straight”—clear and direct. I suddenly understood that a belief in “mortal mind,” or

I didn't have to worry about taking a misstep, because God was putting the right decision clearly in front of me.



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another mind apart from God, was what was making this decision seem complicated and stressful. But in reality, there is only one Mind—God. And Mind was giving me all the right ideas, taking care of my present and my future, and leading me forward.

By the end of the summer, the decision was clear as day: The boarding school was the right place for me. I felt so peaceful about it and even excited for what was to come. My mom bought me a

plane ticket, and I was in the dorm at the beginning of the school year.

Everything at my new school felt right. I fit in quickly, making great friends within the first week. I was able to enjoy playing a new sport, and I felt a lot more focused in my classes and dedicated to my work.

By turning to God, I was led to a situation where I felt truly happy. I'm so grateful to have learned that I can always trust God for guidance. ●

Originally published in the September 7, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

—Psalms 119:105

Stuck in the dark?

By HILARY HARPER-WILCOXEN

Q: *I feel stuck in the dark about my life—frustrated, hopeless, afraid. Help.*

A: We think of darkness and light as being two sides of the same coin, but are they? For a planet, the answer is yes. But not for a ray of sunlight. To the ray of sunlight there is no darkness. Its entire identity is light.

When we feel like we're in the middle of darkness—struggling with doubt, confusion, or depression; feeling lost or panicked—identifying with the ray of light can help. A lot. Jesus knew this. He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) and, "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30).

Sunbeams don't choose to be sunbeams; they just are. They can't help but be full of light because their source is full of light. And they can't be different from their source. Sunbeams also don't choose which way to shine or what to shine on. The sun has that role.

In this analogy, if the sunbeam represents us, the outcome, then the sun represents God, the very good "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). So all the good we are—all the light we express—must be steady, permanent, and secure, because God, the source of that goodness and light, doesn't ever change.

A healing I had once helped make this idea very real to me. I'd hurt my knee

while dancing. I wasn't able to move normally or, of course, to dance. I'd had other healings through prayer before, so my first response was to pray the way I'd learned to in the Christian Science Sunday School. I prayed a lot, and a Christian Science practitioner also prayed for me. I read and studied everything she suggested, including passages from the Bible and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, all of which were helpful and inspiring. But after more than a week, there didn't appear to be any improvement. I felt frustrated and in the dark about how to move forward.

Finally, I got tired of this and went to dance class anyway. I still couldn't straighten my leg, but I figured I might be able to do something simple. As I stood there in a lot of pain, a sudden thought came shining in: "You were never the source of your ability. It was always God. Always."

I reasoned from there that if this was true, then none of that ability, freedom, strength, flexibility, or grace could be taken away from me, either—any more than a sunbeam can decide not to shine. That gave me courage and humility, and I felt I could finally move forward and out of the fear and frustration. As it turned out, I was able to do most of the "barre" that day and move a bit in the center work, and in a few days I was dancing, and even performing, with freedom and

When we feel like we're in the middle of darkness—struggling with doubt, confusion, depression—identifying with a ray of light can help.

strength. I had learned a lesson in being a ray of light.

I love the way Mrs. Eddy describes our light-filled nature, and the reason for it, in *Science and Health*: “Man is not God, but like a ray of light which comes from the sun, man, the outcome of God, reflects God” (p. 250). This helps me when I feel like there is a dark side to life: feelings and fears that make me wonder if I really am connected to God, to good. It helps because, as I look at that fear or doubt or hopelessness, I can ask myself, “Is that planet thinking or ray-of-light thinking?”

Clearly, it’s the planet perspective. The one that looks toward the sun,

rather than out from it; that sees itself as an independent force (good and bad), with dark and light phases. That’s when, through prayer, I recalibrate my thinking and remind myself that since God is All, really and truly, then I don’t even

have the power to be in a dark place mentally. I am always, actually, full of light. Full of joy, purpose, strength, health. Not just for half a day, or here and there, but forever.

Letting go of planet thinking allows us to see who and what we really are, and that we are completely dependent on God for our life, our direction, our hope, and our happiness—just like a ray of light.●

*Since God is All,
really and truly, then
I don’t even have
the power to be in a
dark place mentally.*

Originally published in the September 21, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF



Say no to self-harm

By DEBORAH HUEBSCH

Some people cut themselves. I burned myself with cigarettes. At the time, I was in such emotional pain that I could hardly stand it. I felt driven to make that pain physical somehow. It seemed to relieve the tension inside me.

After several years of this self-destructive behavior, complete with obvious scars on the insides of my wrists, I found a much better way to deal with the hurt.

I'd started reading *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy and was struck by this statement: "... Love supports the struggling heart until it ceases to sigh over the world and begins to unfold its wings for heaven" (p. 57).

Talk about a game changer! Up until that moment, I'd been seeing myself as a troubled young person with all sorts of emotional wounds. Because I felt totally unloved, I assumed I was unlovable.

But Love, God, "supports the struggling heart," and I felt like I certainly qualified. From this I concluded that God must love me. Wow! Suddenly I glimpsed that there was a way to feel loved—though it was different than what I expected. Previously I had been yearning for a person to love me. But the fact that God loved me meant I must be lovable. Wow again!

And with that realization began a journey that rid me of the pain that caused me to burn myself. It didn't happen overnight; it took a couple of months. But the full healing came as I understood why I am—why everyone is—lovable.

It has everything to do with what I was learning in Christian Science about creation. God created the universe, including all of us, spiritually. And because we all express God, our divine Parent, we must include all the qualities of the creator, our Father-Mother. Since God is good, we must be good, too.

Starting there in prayer helps us see that our true nature is worthy of love. And you don't want to hurt something that is loved. Instead, it's natural to cherish and support that goodness because it is lovable.

So what about the self-hatred that fuels self-harm? Prayer helps us exchange the false view of a stressed-out, damaged, out-of-control person for a clear realization that we are each God's oh-so-dearly loved child. In prayer, we

look to God, our divine source, for clues as to our real identity. Since God is good and includes the qualities of intelligence and beauty, so we, as God's creation, are truly

good, intelligent, and yes, even beautiful. That may seem like a stretch. But it is true. And as we feel God helping us let go of negative views of ourselves, we will more readily see our goodness.

I definitely gained a different view of myself: that I am inherently good and therefore lovable. As this fact became more apparent to me, the searing emotional pain simply disappeared. When the pain was gone, so was the reason for the burning.

So what happened to my yearning for human love? The recognition that God loves me simply filled me up. I found

Because I felt totally unloved, I assumed I was unlovable.

happiness and contentment. There was no longer a driving need to find people who would love me. But I was also amazed to see how God's tender love for us can become evident in our lives. One way this happened for me was that I met some really good friends.

If the temptation comes to engage in some kind of self-destructive behavior, maybe ask, "Would I do this to someone I love?" That's a wonderful reason not to do it to someone God loves—that'd be you!

P.S. All the scars are gone, too. ●

Originally published in the October 5, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

How I prayed when I felt sick before my exams

By AVANTIKA DEY

Four days before my science finals in school, I started experiencing the symptoms of a cold. At first, the sneezing and coughing weren't that bad, but by the next morning, they'd become very aggressive.

Because I've had many healings through Christian Science, I quickly called a Christian Science practitioner (who was also my Christian Science Sunday School teacher) and asked for her prayerful help. She lovingly agreed to pray for me and reminded me of what we'd been doing in my Sunday School in Chandigarh: Two weeks before, we had talked about issues that might come up during our exams, and our teachers had asked us to write down spiritual ideas to help us pray about those problems in advance. We'd used that week's Christian Science Bible Lesson (found in the *Christian Science Quarterly*) on the subject "Mind" as our inspiration. The practitioner suggested I refer back to that list of



issues and read my answer to the question about how I could pray if I wasn't feeling well before an exam.

After we hung up, I went back to my notes and saw that I'd written down a passage from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy as my response: "Science not only reveals the origin of all disease as mental, but it also declares that all disease is cured by divine Mind" (p. 169).

I saw that I could trust God to heal me.

I also prayed with another passage from *Science and Health* that the practitioner had shared with me: "Take possession of your body, and govern its feeling and action. Rise in the strength of Spirit to resist all that is unlike good" (p. 393).

As I prayed with this idea, I understood more clearly that because God gives me only good, these symptoms

I could trust God to heal me.

couldn't be part of me, since they weren't good. I realized that I had the strength from God to rise up mentally and "dust off" anything that wasn't good, just like I would brush sand off my clothes.

The next day I felt better but was not completely healed, so the practitioner asked me to read Hymn 221 in the *Christian Science Hymnal*. The last part of this hymn says:

Thy kingdom, God, within us
Shows forth Love's sweet control.

God's idea, man, rejoices;
He knows the reign of Soul.
(Margaret G. Matters)

I understood that since the kingdom of God—true health and harmony—is within me and permanent, nothing could rob me of my health and wholeness.

By the next day, which was the day before my final science exam, I was completely healed. And I did very well on the exam! I thank God for this healing. ●

Originally published in the October 19, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

What you can do about racism

By CHRISTIAN KONGOLO with JENNY SAWYER

As a Black man living in Oslo, Norway, Christian Kongolo has frequently dealt with being "different." But it wasn't until recently, he admitted, that he began to see the importance of addressing issues like racism in a way that brings broader and more lasting change. He talked with the Sentinel's Jenny Sawyer about how he's been thinking, praying, and talking with the people in his life on the subject.

Christian, tell us about where you were on some of these race-related issues even six months ago.

As just one example, I'd heard people talk about wanting more representation of Black people in movies. I didn't see the need for it, to be honest. Growing up as a Christian Scientist, I've always been more likely to focus on things other than people's appearance or skin color, because

I learned in Christian Science Sunday School that our identity—our spiritual identity as God, good, created it—goes beyond these physical characteristics. That's not to say diversity doesn't matter; it does. It just wasn't something I thought about all that much.

But recently, as there's been much more discussion about subtle forms of racism and how they lead to this lack of representation and even exclusion, I got it on a much deeper level that we can't gloss over the ways in which certain people have been marginalized and stereotyped—and worse—because of their skin color.

Have you ever experienced that in your own life?

In my job search, I was talking to various groups within the organizations where I was applying and quickly became



aware that everyone was white. Even in my current job, I'm one of just a handful of Black employees. And it's so unusual to see Black people working in the financial industry here in Oslo, that a white man explicitly expressed his astonishment when he found out that I was working in finance.

I've also noticed that there are certain stereotypes about Black people that I've had to confront—such as Black people aren't competent, or aren't the best people to be in my particular industry.

That definitely brought home the importance of representation, because I can see how having more diversity helps break down stereotypes. We aren't just cleaners, musicians, and athletes.

Now that you've seen the need to deal with this issue more directly, how are you praying about it?

One of the things I find helpful to reflect on is an article by the Discoverer of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, titled "The Way," in which she explains why self-knowledge, humility, and love are requisite for effective healing (see *Miscellaneous Writings*

1883–1896, pp. 355–359). I think the combination of all three qualities is so important, because I've encountered a lot of people who want to go straight to love. But that love, or really, what's actually just the appearance of love, can end up glossing over everything that's wrong without really dealing with it.

I think of it like this: If you have a bottle that's filled with dirty water, you have to empty it first before you can fill it with pure water. And self-knowledge and humility are part of "emptying the bottle." First we have to see that the water is impure. Then we have to acknowledge, in humility, that we're not willing to put up with the impure water anymore. We want to dump it out—all of it. And then, once we've done that, we can fill it to the brim with that pure water—with love.

We don't address racism simply by throwing love at people, because that doesn't allow for seriously considering our own thoughts and hearts and how they might need changing. How we might have biases, or feelings of privilege, or places where we've gone wrong.

Where are the subtle places where ungodlike thoughts about our brothers and sisters might be lurking? Can we, in humility, acknowledge that we all have room to grow? Are we willing to let in more of the light of divine Truth to expose the dark thoughts that seem like our own, but ultimately don't belong to us because they aren't from God? This kind of prayer allows us to love much more sincerely, because then we're doing what Jesus asked us to in one of his teachings: to take the beam out of our own eye—to deal with our own blind spots. Then we aren't held back by limited or ugly thinking that would prevent us from radiating that pure love from God that heals.

How has this prayer changed your conversations about racism?

Here in Norway, when the word *racism* comes up, I've heard people say things like, "What's the point of talking about this, because it will only divide us?" I'm not saying we have to talk about racism all the time; our prayer of self-knowledge, humility, and love is really what should be constant. But when I hear things like that now, I recognize that that kind of thinking is what the Bible calls "Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).

We can't pretend that we're all living in equality and everyone's united when that's not the case. If you're cleaning the house, you don't sweep dirt under the carpet, because then things are just as dirty as before—even if you can't see it.

I think a healing of racism in our world begins as we have the difficult conversations within ourselves and with others. But it's important to keep in mind that these conversations are not about being accusatory. That's what I love about Christian Science: It teaches us how to expose the things that aren't right without attaching them to ourselves or others. We do have to take responsibility for the thoughts we're allowing in. But ultimately, if those thoughts aren't from God, they aren't part of us, and we can be free of them. Everyone can be free of them. And then we begin to find the equality and unity that are real and lasting. ●

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Intelligence that's always present

By EMMANUEL TEKILA

It was my first year of university in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the exam period was approaching. Things weren't looking good for me in my financial mathematics and descriptive statistics courses, which were core courses in my program. I understood almost nothing and saw myself as less intelligent compared to other classmates who expressed mastery in these two courses. I did not feel ready for exams at all.

In the Christian Science Sunday School, I had learned different synonyms for God, which express His various attributes. One of my favorites was "Mind." God being divine Mind, He is the true source of intelligence and understanding.

This seemed very relevant to my situation. I turned to the Bible, where I discovered many stories showing how those who asked God for wisdom and intelligence with an honest heart were cared for. For instance, knowing that governing his kingdom would not be an easy task, King Solomon asked God for wisdom. Moses, sent to Egypt to bring out the children of Israel, complained that he was slow of tongue; there, too, God reassured him that He would help Moses know what he should say. Christ Jesus, the Master, demonstrated that intelligence is a faculty of the always permanent divine Mind, not a human brain: "And the Jews marvelled, saying, How

knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15).

These examples, among many others, helped me understand that each one of us has the ability to express intelligence, whatever the circumstance. Fundamentally, intelligence isn't something to "acquire." On the contrary, we express the infinite intelligence that comes from God, divine Mind, the source of all knowledge. Man, God's spiritual offspring, does not become intelligent by going to school; rather, man is the expression of God's intelligence. Mary Baker Eddy writes: "Mind is not necessarily dependent upon educational processes. It possesses of itself all beauty and poetry, and the power of expressing them" (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 89).

In my prayers I refuted the notion that God's creation could lack intelligence and understanding, and I claimed my true identity as an idea, or expression, of the divine Mind.

I had enrolled in a study group with other friends, because the only way I could get through exercises was with others' help. But as I continued to pray, there was noticeable improvement: I was able to solve exercises on my own at home without feeling stuck. The assessments on the horizon no longer felt like an insurmountable problem.

Still, I felt smothered by the notion that my success would depend on a personal ability to retain facts. I humbly acknowledged that in reality intelligence is not about some personal mind taking tests, but the action of the divine Mind expressing itself in its creation. The real "actor" is God. Man, as God's reflection, is actuated by God. The Bible reassures us about this: "Not that we are sufficient

of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (II Corinthians 3:5). Because our abilities come from God, we are empowered to express intelligence, understanding, and excellence in everything we rightfully need to do.

This gave me a lot of relief, and I felt free from the burden of these exams. These beautiful words from a prayer Mrs. Eddy gave us called the "Daily Prayer" provided assurance: "... let the reign of divine Truth, Life, and Love be established in me ..." (*Manual of The Mother Church*, p. 41). Yielding to God makes us a better transparency for the Christ-power in action.

There were other tangible outcomes of my prayers. After taking a financial mathematics oral quiz prior to the final exam, I was among the 39 students in my class of nearly 600 who scored so well as to be excused from taking the exam. As for descriptive statistics, I gained such mastery of the formulas and calculation methods that I was even able to help some friends prepare too.

I now have a better understanding of this passage in *Science and Health*: "... business men and cultured scholars have found that Christian Science enhances their endurance and mental powers, enlarges their perception of character, gives them acuteness and comprehensiveness and an ability to exceed their ordinary capacity. The human mind, imbued with this spiritual understanding, becomes more elastic, is capable of greater endurance, escapes somewhat from itself, and requires less repose" (p. 128).

Yes, it is so true that yielding to the divine Mind, God, helps us achieve what we need to do with more freedom and excellence. ●

Originally published in the October 26, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

The *perfect* relationship?

By CINDY MARTIN

I was really thrilled with my boyfriend, and deeply in love. My parents weren't so thrilled about him. He was older than I was. And there were the drugs; we smoked marijuana and took THC, and then later used harder drugs and alcohol. However, he also had a spiritual leaning and loved nature; I loved that we had those things in common.

Looking back, I can see that my mom was afraid, and that she was worried about me. Unfortunately, at the time, her opposition only made me dig in my heels. Her words of concern about my boyfriend seemed so hypocritical, since she'd taught me that all of God's children are good because we reflect God's goodness. So why, I wondered, wasn't she seeing the good in my boyfriend?

A year later, though, I discovered that my boyfriend was cheating on me and hiding a shadier character that he indulged when I wasn't around. Disappointed and heartbroken, I started turning to God, praying for us both. I prayed to know that God gave both of us an irresistible love of good, and that this was the only attraction, since in reality, good is the only power. I began

attending the Christian Science Sunday School again and had a wonderful Sunday School teacher, in whom I felt comfortable confiding and who loved and supported me. The cheating stopped, and our affections were renewed, but the drug use continued.

One day, after several weeks of praying and gaining more clarity, I told my boyfriend that the life we were living was not the life I wanted to live. I was relieved

and happy when he said it wasn't what he wanted either. That very day, I stopped the drug use and never drank again. It was a major turning point in my life.

My boyfriend and I started attending church, and later, we both joined the church and felt good about the lifestyle changes we were making. It was a

happy time of rediscovering our innocence and the true joy of feeling God's ever-present love.

However, every time I prayed about the future of our relationship, I felt like I was getting the message to end it. I didn't hear a voice telling me this, but I did feel God's love, and this contrasted with the growing discord I felt with my boyfriend. I also never felt the deep

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BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF

peace that I'd felt at other times when God gave me comforting answers to other problems I'd prayed about. I tried everything I could to wrap God around my plan of ongoing romance. Didn't I deserve love? As it turns out, I did—but God, the all-knowing Mind that is Love, was already providing something better for me than my best plans for myself.

As I became more attuned to God and His love and direction, I started to recognize a pattern of emotional abuse in my relationship with my boyfriend, which always left me off balance and fearful. We had frequent disagreements, and I realized I wasn't really happy.

I prayed for strength and courage and finally ended the relationship. It was devastating at first, but in those dark places of loneliness, I discovered, we do find God right there with us. I often shouted into the night that God loved me. That I was precious and not alone. And God spoke with and comforted me, and I really got to know God on an intimate, peace-filled, and joyful level. I will always be grateful for this wilderness time of finding my closeness with God.

In the *Glossary of Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mary Baker Eddy provides a spiritual definition of *wilderness* that begins, "Loneliness; doubt; darkness." But it also includes a brighter promise: "the vestibule in which a material sense of things disappears, and spiritual sense unfolds the great

facts of existence" (p. 597). This promise proved true for me. As I let go of what I'd thought was the perfect relationship and an important source of love in my life, I learned much more about the infinitude of God's love and that it really does meet our needs.

God's love inspired me to turn outward, and avenues of service opened up to me. I taught Sunday School, worked as a counselor at a camp for Christian Scientists, and later became a wilderness survival instructor and environmental educator. I met a wonderful man who shared my love of the outdoors and

Christian Science. He later became my husband. And my former boyfriend and I remained on friendly terms; he even wrote me a note once telling me he would always be indebted to me for my efforts on his behalf.

Many of the Bible's healing accounts involve trials and difficult journeys, so our lives may not always be smooth and problem-free. But the Bible also includes the promise that we will always find God in the midst of these wilderness experiences, and that the blessings we gain from this discovery far outweigh anything we give up along the way.

I never expected things with my boyfriend to end the way they did. But I'm forever grateful for the way that relationship set me on a journey to find God and my perfect relation to Him. God truly does love us the way we have always yearned to be loved!●

As I let go of what I'd thought was an important source of love in my life, I learned much more about the infinitude of God's love and that it really does meet our needs.

Originally published in the November 9, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

Why didn't it work out?

By LAURA LAPOINTE

Q: *What am I supposed to think when something that seemed meant to be doesn't work out?*

A: It seemed like it was meant to be. For at least a year, I'd been yearning to have a dog in my life. One day I learned that a puppy—just the breed I wanted—was going to be available soon. In the pictures he looked so precious!

He was even cuter in person than in the photos. I loved cuddling up with him and watching as he played with his new toys. But within a couple of days of bringing him home, I began to feel I'd made a big mistake. And it soon became clear that I was not the right owner for this puppy.

I was devastated. I'd already become very attached to him, and it was painful to contact the original owner and tell her that I needed to give him up. When I did, though, it turned out that there was a couple in the next town over who had one of these dogs and had recently expressed an interest in having a companion for him.

I was so grateful for the puppy's new home and for being relieved of a responsibility I wasn't ready for. But afterward, I found myself agonizing over questions like, "Why didn't it work out, especially when it seemed so right at first?"

These questions preoccupied me over several months, and I wasn't finding

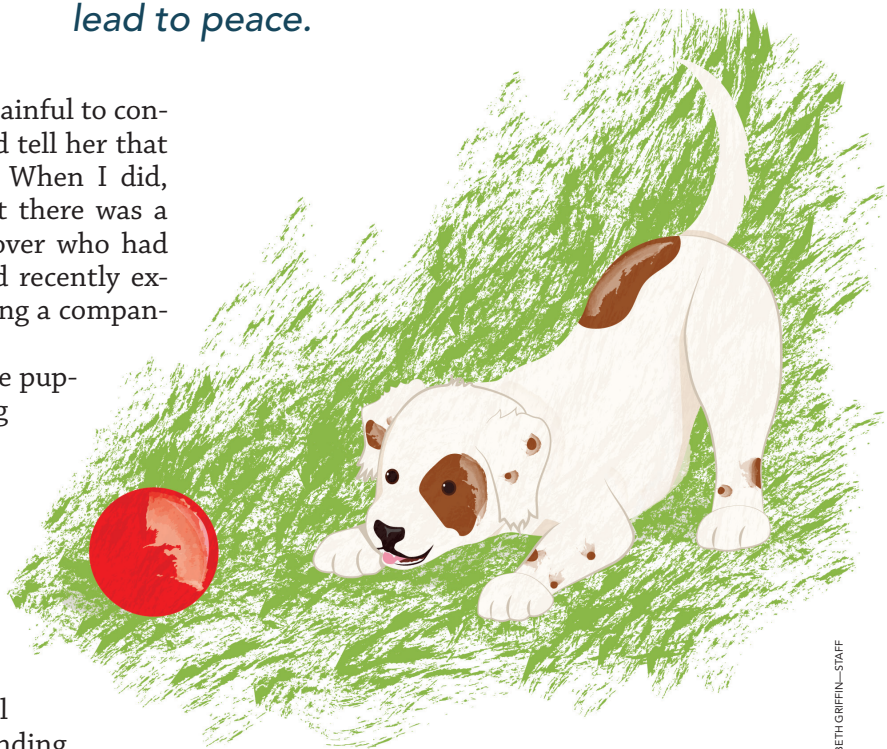
satisfying answers. Then one day during a service at my local branch Church of Christ, Scientist, we sang a hymn with words that spoke directly to the place in my heart that had been feeling so hurt. It said,

Humble hearts accept Your blessing,
Turn from sorrow, want, and sin,
Turn the page, rewrite that story,
As the Christ is welcomed in.

(Fenella Bennetts, *Christian Science Hymnal*: Hymns 430–603, No. 529)

*In general, asking
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I saw that I could "rewrite [the] story" of the experience with letting go of this puppy by seeing the experience from God's perspective—the



BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF

perspective of divine Love—rather than from my own, limited, self-critical viewpoint. For the first time, I realized that I didn't have to view things not working out as a failure; instead, I could see the whole situation as an example of God's tender care and grace—both for the puppy and for me. And later, when I ended up moving to a place where I couldn't have had a puppy, this care was even more evident to me.

In general, asking “why” questions about hard experiences doesn't lead to peace; those questions can actually keep us stuck in the painful feelings and speculation. In these moments, I've found comfort in a simple statement from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* where Mary Baker Eddy writes, “Mortal existence is an enigma” (p. 70). Knowing that we won't find answers as long as we're viewing things from the ground up—from a limited, material standpoint—liberates us from seeking explanations within the troubling experiences themselves. Then we're free to lift our thoughts higher and ask questions like, “How did God care for me during this experience?” and, “How can this teach me more about listening for God's direction?”

When I asked myself those questions about this situation with the puppy, something important became clear to me. I remembered that one day before I got the puppy I'd been praying about the decision and had opened the

Bible looking for comforting answers. The page I'd opened to included verses in Second Kings that repeatedly ask the question “Is it peace?” (9:17–19). At the time, I'd been confused by this message. But I realized later that the morning I'd picked up the puppy, I had felt anything but peace.

One indication that God is working is a deep and abiding feeling of peace, even if there are occasional moments of apprehension. I had to honestly admit to myself that I had not felt that deep, spiritual peace that indicates the rightness of a decision following God's guidance. This helped me let go of the feeling that something right had been taken away from me and changed my perspective to see that perhaps I'd been pushing ahead

with my own plan even while getting divine nudges to go in a different direction. And it was reassuring to realize that God really had been there all along—before, during, and after.

Ultimately, even when we face what can, at the moment, seem like a disappointing outcome, it's comforting to remember this promise from the Bible: “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28, New Living Translation). To me, it's a reminder that as we accept that God's infinite grace and love have been, and always will be, there for us, we'll discover that, in fact, things really did work out for our good. ●

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after.*

Originally published in the November 23, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

Is the word *God* a turnoff?

By DEBORAH HUEBSCH

Hardly anyone in the Christian Science Sunday School class I teach ever mentioned the word *God*.

“Why?” I finally asked them.

“That word is confusing,” one of the students told me.

Never mind that she was raised in the Christian Science Sunday School and had heard the word *God* used in a positive way all her life. She had friends at school who talked about God in ways that didn’t work for her. God was often defined as a person, a “big dude” somewhere far away. Even knowing that God loved her still made her feel like she was dealing with a person of some kind, rather than the divine infinite.

As a result of this lack of clarity, the word *God* felt confusing, and even meaningless, to her. But while this student wasn’t comfortable using this term, she certainly didn’t want to be anti-God. So

she had to redefine for herself exactly what God is.

What did make sense to her was to think of God as Love, as all good, as Mind. In other words, she was good with thinking of other names for God, or qualities of God—of the substance and essence of what God is—so she could feel that God isn’t something abstract, but something real.

Mary Baker Eddy emphasizes this point when she asks in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, “What is God?” (p. 465). Notice that she doesn’t say “who” but “what.” Then she goes on to define God with synonyms and attributes that reveal God as not a corporeal person but spiritual and ever present, bringing God into view as close and real.

It’s essential to understand the nature of God if we want to see healing in our lives. Healing results from

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BETH GRIFFIN—STAFF

“getting”—understanding—God. This “getting” isn’t an intellectual thing. It’s a deep-down awareness of the underlying infinite good that is the foundation and substance of our being. The neat thing about this is that as we become more aware of this good, we not only “get” God, but also start to get what we really are as the evidence of divine good. As this understanding deepens, we become so convinced of what’s true that we simply aren’t fooled by the bad stuff like sickness, drama, or pain. This is the place where healing happens.

Trying to define a supreme, omnipresent source of good in ways that make sense is no easy job. But it is important. There are a lot of words that are used to mean God. Words are helpful, but they are limited. What we’re after is to know God as a “feel.”

So how can we know God in this more close-up way? For me, it helps to take an idea about God that resonates with me and let it expand as I think about it.

For example, when I was in college and had to write papers, I really focused

on God as intelligence. (I’d just learned about Christian Science and had not been getting good grades.) Before writing a paper, I would allow my thought to expand into that infinite space where intelligence is All and where I could see clearly that there is no room for limitation or unintelligence. I knew that divine Mind is the source of all intelligence, and that that has to include me. Then the papers would almost write themselves. And I did really well.

In this situation, instead of using the word *God*, I thought of *Mind*, because that was relatable and helped God feel more real and understandable to me. One of the beauties of Christian Science is that it gives us

many ways to find God for ourselves.

The bottom line is that we don’t need to get tripped up by what other people mean by *God*. What really matters is what this wonderful, all-loving, ever-available source of good means to us and how we put that understanding into practice in our lives. ●

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idea about God
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Originally published in the December 7, 2020, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

A permanent healing of panic attacks

By WILLIAM WHITTENBURY

During my sophomore year of high school, I began to experience debilitating panic attacks that would sometimes be accompanied by light-headedness and nausea. I hadn't ever had problems with anxiety before, but I was dealing with a lot of school-related stress, as well as some difficult personal issues. The panic attacks were scary and confusing, especially since I'd never faced anything like this before.

I did immediately begin praying about this problem, using what I'd learned in the Christian Science Sunday School. Our class had talked about and memorized a Bible passage that says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). It was reassuring to understand that I couldn't actually be subject to fear, and I turned to this idea frequently. But I also often found it difficult to pray in the middle of a panic attack, and the physical symptoms scared me.

Concerned there might be something seriously wrong, I visited a doctor, who informed me that this problem was the result of stress, and that if I didn't get on top of it, it could lead to bigger problems later. He offered some treatment suggestions, but this was a turning point for me. I knew from past experience that relying on God and Christian Science would lead to complete healing rather than simply managing the problem indefinitely. While I appreciated the doctor's good intentions, I decided to

press forward with Christian Science, trusting that God would lead me to a permanent solution.

As the school year progressed, I prayed regularly with the idea that peace wasn't something that could come and go, because God is the source of my peace, and He is "a very present help in trouble" (Psalms 46:1).

This idea comforted me and helped me continue meeting my commitments, but the problem persisted. Importantly, though, so did I.

Things came to a head when I was on a school bus for a field trip about four hundred miles from home and I began to experience another panic attack. There was nowhere to hide, and I didn't want to have to explain the situation to anyone.

It's often been my experience that desperate moments force me to get myself and my own thoughts out of the way and just listen for God's messages. So this time, rather than launching into mental

I realized that since God is infinite good, all the good God is giving me could never be limited to one particular home or place.



wrestling about why I didn't need to be afraid or how God had given me a sound mind, I simply opened my thought to God and asked what I needed to know.

Even in the midst of the panic attack, I found I was able to shut out the suggestions of fear and quiet my thoughts enough to listen for this guidance. The truth is that God's messages are always with us and are capable of breaking through any fear or confusion, no matter how thick it may seem. They come to us in a way we can understand. That was the case for me on this bus ride.

As I was listening, a gentle thought came to me to look out the window. While this seemed like a bizarre answer, I obeyed. At that very moment, our bus was passing a high school where, carved into the side of the building, were Jesus' words "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). This passage was especially meaningful to me because it's also emblazoned on the wall of my branch Church of Christ, Scientist.

This seemed like such a clear message from God that instantly all the panic I was feeling melted away, replaced with a feeling of awe and buoyant joy. It was so clear to me that God was right there, and that His omnipotent love was vanquishing this problem. I almost laughed at how blatant the message had

been—and how clearly divine. If I hadn't been told to look out the window at that very second, our bus, which was traveling at freeway speeds, would have sailed right by the school without my ever seeing those words.

While I can't remember if that was the last instance of the panic attacks, it was certainly the turning point. And while I don't think I learned anything new in that moment, it was a powerful reminder of what I already knew—almost like waking up. The truth that all of us as God's children are loved, cared for, and not subject to fear is indeed able to overcome any suggestion of anxiety or panic. Within a month or two, I was completely healed, and I have not experienced a panic attack since.

This was seven years ago. I went on to complete my senior year with five Advanced Placement classes—as well as a demanding college engineering curriculum—with total freedom. Years later, someone asked me if Christian Science can help with mental health issues. I was able to answer from my own experience that it can. Whenever we're faced with a challenge, be it mental health or something else, God is always there to prompt us to "look out the window" to see the truth. I'm so grateful for Christian Science. ●

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