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Progress: The Treasured Unfolding of Divine Love's Purpose

It makes me smile to see each of you here today. Our smiles give, of course, only a modest indication of the enduring smile of divine Spirit. To speak of Spirit's smile is not meant to make God a manlike Deity, but rather to point thought toward infinite Soul, which is satisfied with its entire creation and is so pleased with you and me as beloved daughters and sons. Pray to be aware of all the ways in which Soul communicates its approval of the real you.

In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mary Baker Eddy, commenting on the first chapter of Genesis, writes: "Deity was satisfied with His work. How could He be otherwise, since the spiritual creation was the outgrowth, the emanation, of His infinite self-containment and immortal wisdom?"¹ Indeed, how could Soul feel otherwise about its own creation? How could benevolent Mind **behold** its infinite idea as less than "very good"?

The more deeply we come to understand what divine Mind knows, the more readily you and I will be able to behold, in the light of divine Science, Truth's spiritual, perfect man. And, the more readily we will be able to discern what Jacob — with his new name of Israel, symbolizing his hard-won demonstration of Spirit's power over the material senses — could finally say to his brother, Esau: "... I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me."² Pleased, not displeased!

Our Leader's poem-hymn, "Love," which we sang to open this gathering today, includes the phrase "heart to heart."³ I suspect this reference may have something to do with the name for Arden Wood's newsletters. Called *Heart to Heart*, these thoughtful reports serve the purpose of "sharing progress with our friends." Today, I'd like to speak with you heart to heart — on the theme of "Progress: The Treasured Unfolding of Divine Love's Purpose."

I'd like to begin by considering one of Mrs. Eddy's hymns, "Christ My Refuge." The last verse speaks to prayer and daily progress.

"My prayer, some daily good to do
To Thine, for Thee;
An offering pure of Love, whereto
God leadeth me."⁴

This prayer of sincere desire to do **some** good daily brings to mind the Biblical parable of the sower in which Jesus commends **all** those who bear the fruits of honest, healing demonstration, whether it be thirtyfold, sixtyfold or one hundredfold.⁵

We know that in any field of worthwhile endeavor, it's not only **what** we do, but **why** we do it. Unselfish and noble motives count for a great deal — as we know from Jesus' example. Hence the phrase, "An offering pure of Love."

"Whereto God leadeth me." Because unerring divine Mind directs all genuine progress, there is nothing random about true progress. There is an order and continuity to it, a proper sequence, a timeliness. This emerges most clearly in our lives through a commitment to listen for and to obey God's counsel.

A thoughtful observer of society said recently that too many of us seem to live in a state of continuous **partial** attention. Who among us doesn't need to resist a tendency to be too easily distracted? When we pay full enough attention, when we maintain an inspired focus, we are less likely to forget or to neglect what is truly important.

A dedicated servant of divine Love had a sign on the wall of his Colorado mountain cabin. Addressed to God, it reads as follows:

“All my ways are in Your hands,
I listen for Your commands,
Love forms all my plans.”

You and I are here to fulfill divine Love’s purpose for us, to find our individual place — and to be “about our Father’s business”⁶ in filling that unique niche. A recently published book carries this arresting title: *Be Yourself: Every One Else Is Already Taken*.⁷ In a spiritual context, this means much more than saying we’re all different mortal personalities. Let’s daily remember to value our magnificent spiritual individuality — our individual expression of the one generic man, the only kind of man the Father-Mother could create. For the divine purpose to be manifested fully and continuously, God needs your true and individual contribution.

Genuine humility is such a strong quality — what a Christian Science lecturer once defined as the willingness to be what God made you to be. It is a satisfying sign of progress to be able to say, “I’m discovering more clearly how God forever identifies me.”

Each of us here does have an individual niche to fill. In God’s design, no matter how the one liar tries to argue to the contrary, no matter how mortals may attempt to supplant one another, no one can actually take your treasured place.

You will always be you. No one else will manifest the nature of God in quite the same way you do. Though we may sometimes seem to lose sight of our spiritual individuality, it can’t really be lost. Divine Love holds it, Truth beholds it, and Life upholds it.

How do we establish unfolding purpose on a sure foundation? So much of Arden Wood’s healing mission is undergirded by the definition of divine Love’s purpose found in the “Glossary” definition of Abraham: “This patriarch illustrated the purpose of Love to create trust in good....”⁸

We don’t and can’t generate trust by ourselves. It’s much bigger than that. Trust represents our clear reflection of divine Love’s imperative and always developing plan. Those who serve or have served on the Arden Wood Board of Trustees can relate to this. Being a trustee calls forth faithful stewardship. It requires God-created trust in good. Each instance of trustworthy prayer and oversight forwards the mission of this or any other worthwhile organization.

To *sustain* divine Love’s unfolding design in facilities like Arden Wood, a generous expression of shepherding

qualities is vital. Dare to be like Joseph — the youngest son of Jacob. You know his story. No matter what the challenges facing him, he kept his focus on a diviner calling. He kept his moral compass and inner purity. His life illustrates a passage from *Prose Works*: “Progress is spiritual. Progress is the maturing conception of divine Love....”⁹

The shepherding work done by Joseph certainly blessed his own family circle as well as the wider community. His life lifts up such an excellent standard that Joseph receives this Scriptural commendation: “... his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:).”¹⁰

Regardless of our current human calling, you and I are like steady sheep in the Great Shepherd’s flock. At times, we’re even like one of His lambs, expressing those genuinely childlike qualities so needed in our world today — qualities such as pure innocence, faithful affection, joyous trust, and willingness to put off the old and to put on the new.

Along with being shepherded, you and I may sometimes serve directly as instruments of divine Love’s shepherding activity. Consider this poem of mine titled, “Shepherding:”

“A shepherd, Lord,
I am called to be.
How can I shepherd
Unless You shepherd me?”

“When the road is narrow
Your rod keeps me in a straight way.
When the road is long
Your staff whispers,
‘One step enough for today.’

“Autumn memories and windswept winters
Closer to the fold
Our straying souls bring.
While yet and still
Leaping lambs we remain
With the birth of each new spring.”

Here’s an idea or two more about shepherding: Do you recall the original meaning of the word, pastor? It’s shepherd. Stay close to your designated Pastor, the Bible and *Science and Health*. There is no substitute for the inspired Word of God contained in these two books — inspiration that will strengthen the inner fiber of your being as nothing else can.

The prophet, Jeremiah, records this divine promise: “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which

shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."¹¹ Our shepherding Pastor directs and protects us, corrects and connects us.

Let's talk more specifically now about the unfolding purpose of the nursing activity at Arden Wood. The first thing I wish to say is this: The work done by Christian Science nurses, whether here at Arden Wood, at nearby Fern Lodge, or anywhere in the world, truly is a great treasure to our movement. The nursing activity is not only valuable to those most directly benefited. This nursing mission also reassures society that Christian Scientists do not neglect their own, but provide compassionate and skilled care for them.

Very often I am in awe of our nurses, who fulfill the demanding charge given them in the *Manual of The Mother Church*: "...one who has a demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice, who thoroughly understands the practical wisdom necessary in a sick room, and who can take proper care of the sick."¹²

Stay close to this *Manual* provision and indeed to every *Manual* by-Law. The spirit of the Golden Rule permeates the pages of this indispensable book.

Years ago, I felt guided to call a friend who is a Christian Science nurse. I'd been struggling with an abnormal body rash for some time and felt I needed to know more about proper ways to cleanse it. Her counsel was simple and practical: Apply warm water and mild soap. Dry with soft cotton.

Then my friend added something that made all the difference: "Be sure to do it gently." The spirit behind her words awakened me. I realized I'd been feeling anything but gentleness. Life seemed vexing and harsh, and I was being too hard on myself. That one word, gently, opened the door to healing. It lifted my thought to the inspiring ideas contained in our Leader's hymn: "O gentle presence, peace and joy and power..."¹³

I continued to appreciate "Mother's Evening Prayer" and pondered its connection to the 91st Psalm. I felt more tangibly than before that the Father-Mother's arm "encircles me, and mine, and all." When healing came, I realized with new conviction that the divine law of progress fulfills the promise that "loss is gain."

Spiritually viewed, we can never lose our *intact* identity nor any of the good God bestows. In a more relative sense, all that can be lost are lying beliefs and false fears. Each Christ-healing holds the promise of substantial gain in faith, spiritual understanding, and confidence in one's ability

to demonstrate Christian Science. Truly, "When heaven's aftersmile earth's tear-drops gain."

In one of his letters, Paul writes: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children."¹⁴ So what is it that we are to cherish and to treasure? A much-loved Christmas message from Mrs. Eddy provides a clear answer:

"In different ages the divine idea assumes different forms, according to humanity's needs. In this age it assumes, more intelligently than ever before, the form of Christian healing. This is the babe we are to cherish. This is the babe that twines its loving arms about the neck of omnipotence, and calls forth infinite care from His loving heart."¹⁵

This passage can serve as a North Star as we travel the path of unfolding progress. When we rightly value and keep our eye on Christian healing, then all our efforts to care and be cared for, all our wishes to witness progress — in ourselves, in our families, and for humanity as a whole — all these efforts and prayers will prosper.

Our prayers maintain a Pentecostal sense. Let's know that what truly pours forth is what our textbook describes as "the riches of His love."¹⁶ These enlarged treasures of Truth and Love nullify any suppositional pouring forth of hatred or torment. A Pentecostal sense acknowledges the power of divine Spirit acting irresistibly, acknowledges the renewable advent of spiritual understanding, and gratefully acknowledges the unobstructed *flowing* of the one divine influence.

On the original day of Pentecost, the message of the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, was heard by every person in his own language. Let's pray to know that divine inspiration reaches each one *and* comes in a form tailor-made to meet the specific need.

If you were on the shoreline of a quiet lake in the early morning hours, the emerging sunlight would appear to come directly to you across the still waters. If companions were some distance away along the shore, that same line of light would follow them as well.

This opens a small window on a grand truth contained in *Science and Health*: "Through divine Science, Spirit, God, unites understanding to eternal harmony. The calm and exalted thought or spiritual apprehension is at peace. Thus the dawn of ideas goes on, forming each successive stage of progress."¹⁸

That's quite a combination, isn't it, "calm and exalted"? Look for the inspired use of that word "and" in our shepherding Pastor.

As in: calm and exalted; rod and staff; letter and spirit; duty and privilege; affection and virtue; wise as serpents and harmless as doves; revelation and progress; or....

Let's know that each one we meet *can* feel the presence of God's love in a way that he or she can understand and accept and demonstrate. The following account provides some light here: A family of Christian Scientists lived on a farm. One of their goats was trying to give birth, but it was not progressing at all well. One night, the mother prayed earnestly along these lines: "Dear God, may this goat feel the presence of Your love—and in a way she can understand." The mother next walked to the barn to comfort the struggling goat. As she opened the barn door, a rabbit she hadn't noticed before entered with her. The rabbit went straight to the goat who was lying down and began to lick her face. The two creatures stayed together until a new baby was born normally later that evening.

In our metaphysical work—work that should undergird everything in our experience—let's abide by what *Science and Health* calls "the simple rule that the greater controls the lesser."¹⁹ Divine intelligence is in control. Soul, not body, determines the rhythms and orbits of our lives. The divine Principle, Love, is governing. In the words of a hymn: "Thy kingdom, God, within us shows forth Love's sweet control."²⁰ Don't agree that chaos can trump the divine order—an order which is continually multiplying its meaning and blessings.

Life is *unfolding*. Spirit is *moving* on the waters of consciousness. In God's design, the "principality" of conventional medicine and material pharmacy is *not* meant to dominate the practice of Christian Science healing.

We rightly hope and pray for a mental atmosphere in our homes and in places like Arden Wood that will promote genuine healing and happiness. What contributes to this Soul-filled environment? And what does not?

First, keep watch over—*monitor* as a good steward—what should be cherished at Arden Wood. None here is called to nurse a grievance, to harbor self-pity, to indulge in intemperate action, or to cherish resentment. A deep reservoir of goodwill toward each other is essential.

Second, refuse to cherish swaddling-clothes in any form. We're here to encourage new and higher views, to rejoice in more expansive manifestations of love. Let's expectantly *respect* the ability of each individual—whether a young child or a mature student of Christian Science—to drop mental limitations.

In the "Creation" chapter in *Science and Health*, we're taught: "As mortals drop off their mental swaddling-clothes, thought expands into expression."²¹ And on the next page:

"Progress takes off human shackles. The finite must yield to the infinite. Advancing to a higher plane of action, thought rises from the material sense to the spiritual, from the scholastic to the inspirational, and from the mortal to the immortal."²²

What else contributes to a healing atmosphere? Certainly a love of the beautiful and the good! This love is manifested humanly at Arden Wood in many ways, not the least of which are the beautiful trees and gardens. Someone once said that a flower *enriches* the garden in which it is planted. Make it one of your goals to enrich the lives and affections of those around you. And allow others to enrich your life as well.

Here's one of my favorite Pastor passages concerning things that grow: "By its own volition, not a blade of grass springs up, not a spray buds within the vale, not a leaf unfolds its fair outlines, not a flower starts from its cloistered cell."²³ In actuality, these wonders of nature unfold in response to the active power and presence of the divine volition. When rightly viewed as ideas of divine Mind, nature's wonders give evidence to us of the one and only divine will at work—substantially unfolding.

Not by our own volition! Nothing contributes more to a healing atmosphere than an *absence* of human will. When the will of mortals is not dominating, when personal agendas are not being pushed, then there is ample room for the assertion of the divine will. This one true will is fittingly described by Paul as "good, and acceptable, and perfect."²⁴

Resilience contributes to an atmosphere in which the operation of spiritual laws brings healing. In every area of life, the capacity to spring back and to *persist* should be treasured. Resilience is aptly symbolized by the ability of grass to spring back after being trampled.

Our textbook explains: "The grass beneath our feet silently exclaims, 'The meek shall inherit the earth.'"²⁵ Worldly thought may think otherwise, but true meekness is a quality of strength.

It's not easy to move a meek individual off a progressive pathway. Meekness resists and silences the tendency of personal sense to complain. Authentic meekness has staying power. Mercy provides second opportunities and

meekness accepts them. Meekness leaves the door open to what *Science and Health* describes as “the hallowed influences of unselfishness, philanthropy, spiritual love.”²⁶

Meekness is soft in the sense that the good soil of spirituality is softened in a manner conducive to growth and progress. Hardness of heart doesn’t contribute much to the atmosphere we seek. True determination, yes. Being unnaturally hard on ourselves and others, no. Self-correction, yes. Self-condemnation, no!

Meekness and humility go hand in hand. Genuine humility fosters authentic adaptability and the progress attending it. The right kind of adaptability is much more than mere human flexibility. It has a solid metaphysical basis. Our Pastor refers to this: “Love is impartial and universal in its adaptation and bestowals.”²⁷ Hymn 51 states: “Love’s work and Love must fit.”²⁸

Divine Love’s operative law of adjustment defeats disappointment and discouragement, both of which falsely claim to undermine unfolding progress. Did you know that “Dis” is the name for the Roman god of the underworld? As a prefix, it is never up to much good. Take it away from disease and you are left with ease. Remove it from discouragement and courage is left standing. Separate it from disappointed and a sense of being appointed and anointed prevails.

The adaptive nature of divine Love unfolds solutions that are just right. Two winters ago, our son came to Colorado on business. Both my wife and I very much looked forward to his brief visit. We planned a quiet evening together after he finished his appointments in downtown Denver. However, we’d forgotten that he had a previous commitment to meet with some close friends from college days. On the outside, we understood. On the inside, we could not have felt more disappointed.

But, divine Love had not abandoned us. Some measure of humility allowed my wife and me to tune into Love’s unfolding purpose. Spontaneously and in accord with what we were hearing from benevolent Mind, we made plans to drive with our son to another city the next day.

Sharon and I contentedly explored the beauty of the Pike’s Peak area while our son attended a business seminar. There was just enough time to share a quick lunch together, before hustling back to Denver so he could catch a flight home to California. It was such a sweet day. Modestly, but perhaps profoundly too, it evidenced the way divine Love’s adaptive gifts join

hands with meekness and humility. It proved in some measure how Love is in charge of *dovetailing* the events in our lives, moment by unfolding moment.

I like this portion of a poem titled, “The Waiting Upon,” by Doris Peel: “A need is only the space shaped to receive a precise dispensation of grace.”²⁹ Moments of grace, of the divine favor tangibly shining on us, should punctuate our days. Through them, we experience the purposeful and blessing hand of God.

Love persuaded Paul of the full sufficiency of divine grace to meet every need and to overcome opposition to the teachings and demonstrations of Christ Jesus. It is sufficient for you and me as well. Over and again, the New Testament lauds the merits of grace. The original meaning of the Greek word for grace shines throughout Paul’s letters: “The divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.”³⁰ “Grace for grace”³¹ says the Gospel of John. Grace is freely bestowed as a gift from God — so that you and I can express that grace practically and effectively in our daily lives.

“If the Lord build not the house
They that labor build in vain;
Father, may our corner stone
Stand foursquare, without a stain.”³²

Keep the foundation here at Arden Wood and in your churches and homes level and strong. Let the healing Christ be tangibly present. Let sweet purity reign, and it will antidote whatever appears to be poisonous or bitter. *Science and Health* teaches us: “The purification of sense and self is a proof of progress.”³³

As the facts of being are more clearly understood and more fully demonstrated, human experience *is* elevated. We read in *Prose Works*: “Each successive period of progress is a period more humane and spiritual.”³⁴

One other thought about building: For heaven’s sake, keep your roof well-maintained. That is, alertly defend against aggressive or subtle mental suggestions. Actively protect all the treasures that reside within your mental home by seeing them as covered beneath God’s “shelt’ring wing.”³⁵

When genuine manifestations of divine Love are present — in our thoughts and actions — progress occurs in all things most essential. We learn to think absolutely, to speak wisely, to express forgiveness, to give generously and to receive gratefully. We accept our worth as sons and daughters of God and we take

possession of our rightful inheritance. We treasure spiritual understanding and scientific demonstration. We live lovingly.

Our Pastor instructs us: "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."³⁶ Our consistent expression of the divine Principle, Love, is the glue that holds together all valuable building efforts.

In conclusion: Hymn 81 includes a two-word phrase that is very much in my thought these days. That phrase is "safely onward."³⁷ This describes the path of progress. Not just safely, but also onward or advancing. And not just onward, but safely and securely so. In your lives, may divine Mind's unfolding truth take place within the warm embrace of God's sustaining love.

I know of no better yardstick with which to measure our progress than the one provided in the textbook chapter, "Footsteps of Truth." It states:

"To ascertain our progress, we must learn where our affections are placed and whom we acknowledge and obey as God. If divine Love is becoming nearer, dearer, and more real to us, matter is then submitting to Spirit. The objects we pursue and the spirit we manifest reveal our standpoint, and show what we are winning."³⁸

An experienced teacher and practitioner of Christian Science once asked me how I would conclude a treatment. Just slightly intimidated by his stature, I replied, "How about 'Amen'?" Approvingly, he said that would be good. Amen, as in let it be established. Then he looked me in the eye and said, "Don't forget the 'Alleluia.'" Alleluia as in grateful joy that the truth of being is already perfectly complete in divine Mind. As in thanking God that He does answer sincere prayer. As in praising God for the demonstrable fruits of Christian Science treatment. Amen and Alleluia!

- 1 *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 519:3, Deity
- 2 Genesis 33:10
- 3 *Christian Science Hymnal*, 30
- 4 *Ibid.*, 253
- 5 Mark 4:1-20
- 6 Luke 2:49
- 7 *Be Yourself: Every One Else Is Already Taken*, Mike Robbins
- 8 *S&H*, p. 579:12
- 9 *Miscellany*, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 181:8
- 10 Genesis 49:22-24
- 11 Jeremiah 3:15
- 12 *The Manual of The Mother Church*, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 49:7
- 13 *Hymnal*, 207
- 14 I Thessalonians 2:7
- 15 *Miscellaneous Writings*, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 370:12
- 16 *S&H*, p. 5:17
- 17 *S&H*, p. 43:3 and p. 47:5
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 506:10
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 121:22-24
- 20 *Hymnal*, 221
- 21 *S&H*, p. 255:1-3, As
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 256:1-5
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 191:21
- 24 Romans 12:2
- 25 *S&H*, p. 516:13-15
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 462:28-30
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 13:2-3
- 28 *Hymnal*, 51
- 29 *The Christian Science Journal*, July 1975, Doris Peel, "The Waiting Upon"
- 30 Original meaning of Greek word for grace
- 31 John 1:16
- 32 *Hymnal*, 141
- 33 *S&H*, p. 324:4-5
- 34 *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 26:4-5
- 35 *Hymnal*, 30
- 36 Colossians 3:14
- 37 *Hymnal*, 81
- 38 *S&H*, p. 239:16



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