

The Bible's Golden Thread of Healing: God's Presence

Excerpts from a talk given by Madelon Maupin
at the Arden Wood Annual Meeting, May 2, 2021

Thank you, John. It is such a joy to be with you today and each one of you watching. Aren't we grateful for these virtual meetings?!

We gather today at this Annual Meeting to celebrate one more year of Arden Wood's commitment to Christian healing. As much as any time in the institution's 90+ year history, its example has never been more needed. Speaking for all of us here and around the world who treasure your Christian Science nursing ministry as well as training the next generation of Christian Science nurses, thank you for how faithfully and well you fulfill it.

From many standpoints, particularly health, the past year has been one of the toughest in a century, dealing with the effects of a global pandemic not seen since the WWI era. But as students of Christian Science, we have our Pastor, the Bible, and the means to unlock its spiritual meaning: *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy. These guide us through the maze of fear with which people worldwide are grappling.

If I could net out the essence of this entire talk in a single sentence, it would be this: the claim of a virus is that it is everywhere and dangerous, but it is the divine ever-presence, God, good, that is instead always with us overturning any other claim. That is what we'll be exploring in the next hour.

Here are two brief statements to ponder as we consider, "The Bible's Golden Thread of Healing: God's Presence." Both are from *Science and Health*:

The greatest wrong is but a suppositious opposite of the highest right (SH 368:1).

The rule of inversion infers from error its opposite, Truth... (SH 282:31-1).

I'm going to pause because these are meaty statements that demand our best thinking.

From these we see that error claims to have the same attributes of God, claims to mimic God, claims to provide

real and often frightening counterfeits to God, good. Applying the rule of inversion, we can identify these spurious assertions as false claims of God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omni-action. Aren't these the very claims by health officials of this virus? And not just the virus but for many, economic challenges that resulted from this closed economy.

And this is why the Bible is so important: it provides over 2000 years of examples of spurious claims and counterfeits being overturned, seen through, faced down, canceled, proved powerless. So we're going to take a little stroll — actually more like a marathon dash — through some of the Bible's stories to see how the ever-presence of God, of Spirit, of Truth, of Love, has always been there when turned to and is still here for us to experience. My goal is not to go in depth on

Bible accounts you already no doubt know, but to remind us all of the unbroken 'line of light' that is God's healing presence. Because this is such a big topic, we'll focus on just three points, but first a story.

A few years ago, my husband and I visited the San Diego Wild Animal Park, renamed San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Different from the famous San Diego zoo, this is a species rehabilitation site among other activities — with hundreds of acres where animals that are on the verge of extinction are sent to repopulate. We got on the tram supplied to see the animals in their natural habitat without disturbing them and were thrilled when the guide stopped to excitedly see if a very pregnant mother giraffe had given birth to her baby.

Hallelujah, she had! The little one was literally born within the hour, and we were in awe watching her mom and dad clean her up as she began to deal with her already 6' height and long legs. Then the guide astounded us when he explained that mother giraffes give birth *standing up* in order for the baby to drop about six feet to break the umbilical cord.

So here are the three points about God's presence that tie to our story:



- ❶ That God, our Father-Mother, is always here to nurture and care for us with infinite tenderness, like those giraffe parents for their new offspring.
- ❷ That the jarring moments in our lives are often how we actually find true life, like that baby giraffe's entrance into her world.
- ❸ That the Bible is filled with dozens of examples of individuals who learned these two lessons in case we forget when learning our own!

POINT ❶

Our Father-Mother is always there to nurture and care for us. That is a pretty bold claim. It reminds me of the conviction of a little boy who was asked by a skeptical friend where God was. As the doubting friend named numerous locations, the little boy, each time, unblinkingly, replied that yes, God was in each of those places.

Finally, the questioning friend asked that if the little boy was stranded on a desert island, would God be there? "Yes — because I'd be there, wouldn't I?!"

This little boy understood the great fact that is pronounced like a trumpet call in the Bible's first book and first chapter:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (New King James Version).

It's as if the writers couldn't wait to share their amazing discovery, and just in case we didn't realize the enormity of the idea, they wrote it twice!

It's like the image of the dog in the mirror that can't be separated from the *actual* dog in **front** of the mirror. It is this inseparability of God and man that gives us the **confidence** that God's healing presence is always here, with us. Wherever we are as reflection, God must be there too.

It's as if the writers of Genesis 1 were presenting a scientific textbook to humanity that would reach across the centuries, telling us this is their premise and to please keep reading because, boy-oh-boy, will they be able to prove their premise in case study after case study — which you and I call Bible stories! The scores of Scriptural accounts of men, women and children who follow that Genesis text in the Bible's remaining 65 books, prove the inseparability of God and man over and over in every conceivable circumstance, every near disaster, every seemingly impossible situation that is transformed into something inspiring. This parade of examples is the Bible's golden thread of healing — God's presence made known.

Sometimes this divine presence came as a theophany, a revealing or visible manifestation of God, such as the call to Abraham or through Moses in front of a burning bush.

Here are a few of these biblical figures, going before us, marking our way, linking us through the centuries in a glorious "line of light." In each case, they too faced evil's efforts to counterfeit the divine. They worked through it, and so can we.

NOAH

God's presence directed Noah to build an ark, told him when to enter it, when to exit it, who and what to take along. That divine presence provided every right action that ensured the safety of Noah and his family from a flood that couldn't destroy them, no matter how initially daunting it appeared.

ABRAHAM

God's presence impelled Abraham to leave his native land of Ur and all the polytheistic worship so common there, to find a new land where he could worship the one God, to discover his covenantal relationship with God who would provide both heirs and land. Likewise we are compelled to leave behind today's gods of medicine, physiology and hygiene as the only solutions to man's health.

LOT

When danger and fear tries to reverse the quiet knowing of God's rescuing ever-presence, we remember Lot and his family liberated from Sodom — convinced that God's presence is always ready to rescue, deliver, sustain and provide regardless of how dangerous a situation appears. And remembering Lot's wife, we can see God's ever-presence calling us forward, no longer looking back as if good was confined to the past and not to the present and future as well.

JACOB/ESAU

God's presence of love and reconciliation lifted Jacob from overwhelming guilt about the wrongs he had done his brother Esau, leading to the brothers' full unification for themselves and their families. What a lesson for reversing the claims of regret or irreconcilable differences in our lives.

JOSEPH

God's presence of wisdom placed Joseph in a role where he could bless not only his family but an entire nation, even though his brothers sold him to Midianite merchantmen. Joseph's willingness to bless his enemies and to faithfully listen to God's direction later prevented starvation for many as well as reunited his family when he served Pharaoh in a top position.

MOSES

God's presence unveiled a higher sense of law to the receptive Moses. The Ten Commandments would stabilize a people, a country, and eventually Western civilization for over 3000 years. How could we possibly think that God's law of health, of freedom, of protection, isn't at work today as it has always been?

JOSHUA

God's presence carried the Hebrew people through 40 years in the wilderness, sustaining and guiding them to freedom, supplying the needed leadership of Moses and then his successor, Joshua, to keep them moving forward as they entered the Promised Land, claiming what God had provided for them. How could we think whatever forward steps we need to take are not compelled by this loving, divine Presence today?

DEBORAH

God's presence provided wisdom for judges like Deborah in Israel's early history, bringing direction to the tribes as they were settling into their new land and ensuring inspired leadership when enemies were ready to attack, as Deborah, and her general Barak, experienced. That wisdom is as present today — to receptive leaders and citizens in every nation — guiding them through the necessary legal, economic and health decisions to support wise choices for reopening.

SAMUEL

God's presence lovingly provided childless Hannah the baby she had prayed for, who would grow up to be prophet, priest and judge, blessing Israel in countless ways. Samuel's receptivity to God's presence calling him three times as a boy would remain throughout his life, eventually making him Israel's greatest religious and political leader during this period as he eventually anointed kings.

DAVID

God's presence guided Samuel to anoint an unlikely young man as king, David. He would have the very qualities Israel needed to unite the tribes politically, lead them militarily, and write about half the hymns that Jews and Christians have been singing for 3000 years in the book of Psalms.

Psalm 139: 8-10 especially captures the impossibility of ever being *outside* of God's presence:

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

*even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

Going back to the opening verse in Ps. 139, look how the personal pronoun is used from the beginning:

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me," leaving us with the startling conclusion that God knows both our actions and our very thoughts. Christian Science unpacks this verse with scientific reasoning:

*All that really exists is the divine Mind and its idea,
and in this Mind the entire being is found harmonious
and eternal (SH 151:26-28).*

What an explanation for why we can never be separated from God, infinite Mind.

SOLOMON

Continuing with our review of some key Biblical figures, God's presence imparted the wisdom a young king Solomon needed to lead his people, build the first Temple, fortify key cities and establish Israel's influence with other nations.

ELIJAH

God's presence fortified Elijah when he challenged Ahab and Jezebel's Baal prophets, sustained him with ravens gathering food when he was running for his life, and strengthened him with that still, small voice when he had reached his limits. That loving divine presence even supplied a successor, Elisha, who would carry on his prophetic work of conveying God's word to the people. And so does our work continue as those we love pass from sight. We take up the mantle and keep right on, don't we?

Those are just a few examples from the Hebrew Scriptures, not even touching the life and ministry of Christ Jesus and others in the New Testament. I'm sure you can think of many more.

SEVEN SYNONYMS

Christian Science amplifies this sense of God's presence throughout the Scriptures through the seven synonyms Mrs. Eddy found in her Biblical study and wrote in the definition for God in the Glossary of *Science and Health*. As we understand and apply them to our lives, having recognized their divine action on the lives of these biblical figures, they become like steps on a ladder, enabling us to climb up and out of whatever is trying to pull us under, including any fear about contagion.

Among other actions, it is:

- Principle's presence that orders
- Mind's presence that governs

- Soul's presence that harmonizes
- Spirit's presence that directs
- Life's presence that ensures immortality
- Truth's presence that destroys error, and
- Love's presence that casts out fear

We may identify different facets of God's presence in these Bible stories, but it is always there in some form, underscoring these as a type of contemporary case study that we can look to and learn from. You can be in no situation, now or in the future, where this divine presence isn't meeting your need exactly where you are, in whatever form it must take.

CHRIST JESUS

Christ Jesus gave this divine presence a new name—Father, one of his favorite ways of conveying his closeness to God. "Father" was a designation the Hebrews used for Abraham, their first patriarch—not God. Jesus taught his followers then and now that this one divine parent shepherds, guides, and protects each one. This is the divine presence he taught us to pray to, to acknowledge: "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9).

And as his teaching and preaching continued, John explains how he took this a step further by declaring, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). At one with our divine source, as only an image can be. As we understand these powerful statements, they provide glimpses into how he was fortified during his trials and point to what sustains each of us as we face our own stiff winds.

Christ Jesus' greatest example of unity with his Father—and the greatest example humanity has been given—was, of course, the resurrection. It overturned once and for all the assumption that life must end in death. Instead, Jesus proved that life continues right on in his appearances to his disciples and others. The book of Revelation picks up where the Gospels leave off, featuring the slain lamb, the crucified but *victorious* risen Christ, fighting the beast's claim that God and man can ever be separated, closing the Scriptures with the New Heaven and the New Earth as the accuser is destroyed forever.

PAUL

Saul, prior to his Damascus Road conversion, thought he knew something about this divine Presence. After all, he was head of his class at Hebrew school, a self-described 'pharisee and a son of pharisees' as he told the Jewish Council in Acts 23:6. It would take a blinding Damascus light to transform Paul's understanding from the Law to grace. And that would begin his three decade ministry of teaching and proving this divine Presence that would lead to the conversion of Gentiles to be Christ-followers and

eventually to change the Roman Empire itself from pagan to God-centered. It was nothing short of a new life for Paul as he described to the Romans in his mightiest and last letter summarizing all he had learned in the past 25 years:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)

This 'newness of life,' which Paul experienced, is the result of this same golden thread of Love's healing presence witnessed throughout the Scriptures. Regardless of what political, media, and health officials throw at us, how can we possibly think the same divine power and presence aren't with us today, working on our behalf—lifting us up when we are at our lowest, bringing healing where there is pain, fear or disease, and comforting those who mourn? I suspect every single person on this call can point to many moments of feeling this purifying, uplifting power that is Love's presence guarding and guiding you, bringing healing where it's needed in your experience. This is certainly what Arden Wood's team of Christian Science nurses and staff have been proving all these decades and, of course, this past challenging year.

I'd like to return for a moment to that original Genesis verse that we treasure so much, Gen.1:27—about man made in God's image. That is the spiritual fact that guarantees God's presence is wherever YOU are—like the little boy mentioned earlier understood so well.

Did you ever wonder about the person or persons who wrote that verse: "So God created man in His own image..." (Gen 1:27) I have such respect for these 'priestly writers' as they're called, because they had to prove the inspiration that came to them—as we all do. Isn't this something we've all had to learn? What is lasting and true comes from spiritual inspiration, and then you get the opportunity to prove it in your life—just as Mrs. Eddy did. She had to not only be inspired to write *Science and Health* but also to demonstrate its truths. So many statements from the textbook, when you know some of her history, appear to have been penned after those hard-won victories in court cases, or while with disloyal students, or building her church organization.

The priestly writers that gave us Genesis 1 are no different. Think what they had to learn in a foreign land—that God's loving presence was *still* with them, that they couldn't be separated from God's protection and deliverance, that God wasn't confined to Israel but was everywhere.

And although the priestly writers wrote several hundred

years *after* earlier Genesis writers, the priestly writers put their account of creation first. They must have known how much their inspiration about man as God's image would add to humanity's understanding of the divine Presence.

It's as if those priestly writers who had learned so much during the Exile, were literally saying to us: "We're giving you two very different creation accounts. You decide which one is accurate."

And that's exactly what Mary Baker Eddy did, writing 700 pages of notes on Genesis in her earliest years of discovering Christian Science. Writing of the two Genesis accounts, she explains:

If one is true, the other is false, for they are antagonistic SH 522:4-5).

So how did these priestly writers come to this profoundly different conclusion that Spirit is the creator and man is made in Spirit's likeness? How did they come to see that God and man are inseparable, that man is the image or expression or reflection of Spirit? Because they HAD to learn it in very challenging conditions — during enslavement, when they had to rethink from all they knew and loved. And that is the demand on us: to lean more, trust more, understand more of this foundational truth during an unprecedented time.

POINT 2

Sometimes the most jarring of experiences — the equivalent of a baby's entrance into the world as a 6' drop — are the very things that force our spiritual growth. You probably read about the quantum leap in internet searches on prayer and God that has happened throughout the past 12 months — an example of the spiritual hunger during tough times that demands we go deeper.

The Jewish people made tremendous spiritual strides during their captivity. Before the Exile, the Temple was all-important to them because it was the building that housed God's presence. But during the Exile, the Jews realized God wasn't confined to the Temple — as they experienced firsthand the divine presence at the waters of Babylon, in lions' dens and kings' courts. And they wrote down this new understanding of God, resulting in many of the Scriptures that constitute our Old Testament today.

What a debt we owe them and what an example they set for us to also 'pay it forward' by writing up our understanding of God and our proofs of God's presence for future generations.

A marvelous example of this turning to God is seen in the back-to-back Psalms of 137 and 138. Substitute

in whatever challenge you've faced, individual or collective, like Covid, and we can identify with this lament. I've taken the liberty of adding a few contemporary, equivalent words to theirs.

First a portion of Ps. 137:

By the rivers of Babylon — [the news of a pandemic] there we sat down and there we wept [felt isolated, sad, frightened] when we remembered Zion [life before the pandemic].

How could we sing the LORD's song:

...in a foreign land [in the midst of a global health emergency]?

The Jews who wrote this Psalm were spiritual pioneers, and they didn't stop with the darkness. They understood that the way out of the fear was to express gratitude for the continuous love God still had for them, for God's living presence, regardless of their physical location or circumstance.

So they wrote the very next Psalm, 138, which declares:

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods [of medicine, hygiene], I sing your praise;

I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything [health laws, statistics, news reports].

On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

When they returned to their homeland of Judah, these priests wrote Genesis 1, realizing that God and man are so close that only the idea of 'image' could convey it. There were ancient mirrors — reflective surfaces made of polished obsidian — that date back as far as 4000 BC. The priests would have seen such mirrors throughout their Babylonian captivity. But for these inspired thinkers to make the leap from God as some physical, man-made statue (which was everywhere in Babylon) to realizing man is as close to God as one's likeness in a mirror — well, that is pure inspiration. They only could have seen it by experiencing it. **They glimpsed the simple but profound fact that where they are, God must be.** And you and I, my friends, are the beneficiaries of their inspiration and must apply this same irreversible, spiritual fact to the captivity of our time — global health claims.

We've each, no doubt, experienced the equivalent of dropping six feet in some jarring experience that —

when it was over — we could look back and see it brought a new sense of life. I had such an experience recently.

About six months ago, my beloved husband passed away suddenly. Two mornings after, while walking very early on the beach near our home, I was on my mental knees, reaching out for help to get past the darkness that seemed to be engulfing me.

At that extreme moment, a word came to thought: "Masterclass." And on the heels of that, the phrase: "Masterclass on Immortality." It was like the sun's morning light just streamed in. I realized my husband was in a masterclass on immortality, and how could I possibly grieve about that? He loved God, loved growing spiritually, and had dedicated his life to that and to helping others on *their* journey. So he was continuing right on — learning, growing, and unstoppable. I can't put into words the burden that lifted and has stayed with me since.

But that wasn't all. On the heels of this new understanding of him was the thought that I, too, was in a Masterclass — on Love. That just as he had his assignment to continue growing in an ever-deeper understanding of eternal life, I had my assignment to learn to love more. I remember walking home feeling like I had been spiritually resuscitated.

Since that morning, I won't say things became suddenly easy. On the contrary, when we get a divine message — like the need to learn more about Love — we better be prepared to have whatever experiences will teach us the needed lessons. And so those have come. But I'm not where I was six months ago, just like those Genesis priestly writers weren't where they began when first going into Babylon. And I suspect each one of you has had a tough experience that nonetheless brought substantial growth.

Isn't that what you and I signed up to do: mature spiritually? If you didn't, you wouldn't be attending Arden Wood's Annual Meeting. So we celebrate a year not only of this

beautiful institution's healing victories, but of our own as well. Whatever 'baby giraffe' experience has caused you to wake up this past year — even if it has been jarring — is the very one that we can be most grateful for. It means we're a little clearer about the absolute truth of Genesis 1, a little more sure that nothing can separate us from this loving Presence that is our Father-Mother, a bit more sure-footed spiritually, less thrown by the winds that would try to blow us off course. This is spiritual growth, my friends, and like our young giraffe, it enables us to move forward with joy in our lives.

As we come to a close, my hope is that these three points of a very big subject have been helpful:

- 1 That our Father-Mother is always there to nurture and care for us with infinite tenderness, like those giraffe parents for their new offspring.
- 2 That the jarring moments in our lives are often how we actually find our true life, like that baby giraffe's entrance into her world.
- 3 That the Bible is filled with hundreds of examples of individuals who learned these two lessons — in case we forget them when having our own rough times!

From Genesis to Revelation, we see individuals waking up to what is always there — God's healing presence — all the time, in every place, in every situation. Their journey is a torch lighting our way.

So with a heart overflowing with gratitude for God's loving presence and as a way to express our thanks, we can join the writer of Ps. 61:

*I'll be the poet who sings your glory —
and live what I sing every day.*

Thank you! 🍀

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