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## Spiritual empowerment: the road to freedom

By Elise L. Moore

No situation is so extreme that God can't reach someone. Barriers of time, society, history, hopelessness, can be removed through faith in God. It isn't necessary to wait for outward circumstances to change in order to prove the power of Spirit.

At a Wednesday evening service in a Church of Christ, Scientist, I heard about a woman serving a life sentence in prison. She has been awakening to the love of God and the power of Spirit to heal and transform her. She gave permission to use excerpts from personal letters to tell her story here.

As with all of us, some chapters are better than others, and there are setbacks along the way. The story isn't finished. But I found that just seeing how this woman is overcoming limitations of personal history and societal condemnation, even in prison, can be encouraging and inspiring.

(Letter #1) "I have been a drug addict for many years, and as you might know I have been in prison before. . . . because of California's Three Strike Law I was given a life sentence. . . . I did not hurt anyone or take anyone's property nor did I commit a crime against any other person . . . only myself . . . I have to admit that there has been a king-size hole in my life for so many years, but I am learning to fill that hole with the love of God . . . our Father-Mother God."

(Letter #2) "When I first got to prison I was very, very ill and suffered a stroke. We have eight women in each cell here. All the girls I was in the cell with were praying for me. All I remember is being so weak and sick. My heart was sick and not from the stroke. I had given up on everything .... I could hear the girls praying but they seemed so far away.

Then all I could see was the brightest light. . . . I have never felt that good before in my entire life, and I kept saying that I just wanted to stay there in

that place always . . . . I don't know how to express the love I felt in that experience, but I know in my heart that everyone should be able to feel that love sometime in their lives. Since then my health has a gotten better. Probably better than I have felt in my whole life."

*As a child, this woman had studied Christian Science. Around the time of these letters, and with the prisoner's consent, her aunt arranged for a visit by a Christian Science practitioner who was serving as a volunteer chaplain for the prison system. She is referred to as Mrs. S in this article in order to maintain the confidentiality of the contact. Mrs. S has verified the facts in the prisoner's letters.*

(Letter #5) "Mrs. S sent me a copy of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, and I have been reading it daily."

(Letter #11) "Mrs. S comes to see me every other week, and I cannot begin to tell you how much I look forward to her every visit! My life is so much richer and my health has improved to be the best it has been in the seven years I have been here! I have so much contentment in my heart and the time is passing so quickly! I read my weekly Bible studies and constantly read the *Science and Health*. . . . I finally have peace in my heart, and my whole outlook has changed so much. Christian Science is my home, and I was away far too long! It is the ultimate Gift of Life! "

(Letter #19) "I am feeling wonderful physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. In every way. I know it is because I have been studying the weekly Bible Lessons. I get so much out of them. My whole attitude and thoughts have changed so much! I surely cannot see even a day of my future without my *Science and Health!* And the weekly Lesson! I have been able to share *two* copies of *Science and Health* with two . . . women who have been looking for something different."

(Letter #20) "I have also been able to share the *Science and Health* with two women outside of here. One is the mother of one of the girls I worked with [in the prison].... The other is the woman I work for now."

(Letter #22) "Mrs. S told me that I had to learn to see myself as God sees me. I have been thinking about that a lot and have come to realize how much my mom and her attitude was affecting the way I see myself."

(Letter #27) "One of the women tried to physically fight me and it was horrible. I spent that whole night in prayer and the next day read the passages you had sent me regarding governing and I kept knowing the truth that God is *love* and that we all have the same mind . . . the mind of God. The next day the woman apologized and now the room is getting along well again. I do use the spirit of Christian Science all throughout the day in here, and it has helped me so much in so many ways. So my feelings of being inadequate aren't so heavy on me."

(Letter #30) "Mrs. S and I were talking about the fact that I haven't allowed being denied parole to overwhelm me the way the last denial did. I think it's because I am so excited about the many healings I have been experiencing lately. . . . I had two moles under my left breast that had grown quite large and very dark in color. I have just been studying the Lessons so much and reading the *Science and Health* daily and one day while I was in the shower I noticed that the two moles are *completely gone!* I had also started to get a mole on my neck, and now it is gone as well! I am so happy that I am knowing that I am God's child, reflecting His life, truth, and love. And know in my heart that the Father-Mother God is governing my life at all times!"

*Mrs. S has been visiting this prisoner for over two years, and continues to do so. It's clear from the prisoner's account that Science and Health has been an empowering force in her life. And, of course, that empowerment is not limited to people in prison.*

Some women, for instance, feel imprisoned by factors outside their control. A friend of mine, for example, felt chained to her job. Another friend told me she felt trapped by her marriage. A third woman complained of aloof parents. Their lack of affection and attention barred her, she thought, from feeling loved or lovable. Another woman couldn't shake feelings of loneliness, although she knew she was loved by family and friends.

They aren't alone. Many women (and men) feel pressured by a fast-paced society and limited by personal history. More than just a positive attitude is required to break free from such mental and emotional barriers. Positive thinking and affirmations of human potential can take a person only so far. Deep-down, transformative change uplifts an individual into a spiritual awareness and experience of the Divine.

A tangible awareness of God's loving presence enables anyone to feel more

alive, to be receptive to a higher view of their nature. And consciousness of God's power can actually heal sickness. This presence and power is the activity of divine Spirit. It was expressed in the life of Jesus as the transforming Christ, which heals.

The Bible describes the activity of Spirit in terms of freedom and the ability to reflect, or express, God's nature. That freedom can come to anyone, anywhere—as the prisoner's letters show. The Apostle Paul wrote about the freedom of Spirit this way: "Now . . . where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." <sup>1</sup>

It's God who brings freedom and empowers men and women to realize their Godlike spiritual identity. To me, the word *glory* indicates the divine nature. So the spirit of Christ frees people from past mistakes and transforms them until their divine nature is more clearly seen. This is being the image of God.

Whatever barriers are limiting life, God, Spirit, can remove. The author of *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy, wrote her book out of her own experience with the transforming power of Spirit. She affirmed, "Let us feel the divine energy of Spirit, bringing us into newness of life and recognizing no mortal nor material power as able to destroy." <sup>2</sup> This is the right of every woman and man.

<sup>1</sup> II Cor 3:17, 18. <sup>2</sup> *Science and Health*, p. 249.