

Reprinted from the Christian Science Journal, November, 2007
All rights reserved.

Spiritual Preparation and the Good Samaritan

By Elise L. Moore

"I feel guilty if I'm not doing things for others." I often hear this statement followed by, "As a Christian, shouldn't I be helping others?" Many people feel overwhelmed with responsibilities to do good for others and confused by conflicting moral priorities. One individual I spoke with said that in order to help someone else out, she had to work at her job fewer hours. As a result, she had difficulty paying her bills, and that had led to mounting credit card debt. She wanted to be a good Samaritan, yet she felt a conflict between taking care of herself and taking care of others.

When Jesus urged his followers to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and take in the stranger (see Matthew 25:34-40), he surely didn't mean that his followers should go hungry, thirsty, and homeless as a result. To me, being Christian means that we reflect and multiply God's goodness, not that we use up all our human resources in generosity toward others.

Jesus established the moral and spiritual foundation for any good Samaritan's action when he said that the greatest commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and that the second is like it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39).

The first command requires that we place God first in our thoughts and affections. By turning to God for wisdom and guidance before we turn to friends and family, seeking spiritual understanding instead of just human reasoning, we place God first. Loving God with all our heart and soul and mind means we revere the Divine as the source of all goodness, health, and harmony. This turns us from focusing on physical ailments to focusing on spiritual solutions, lifting us to a new altitude of thinking and living.

Loving God with all our heart, we feel our unity with Him/Her. This relation between divine Love and ourselves is a spiritual connection, immortal and

eternal--deeper and more lasting than any human kinship. And understanding our primary relation to God forms the foundation for our productive, satisfying relationships with others.

The second part of Jesus' command continues this sense of priority. First, we love ourselves. Then we know how to wisely love our neighbor. Loving oneself humanly, however, can be narcissistic and self-indulgent. Isn't the command to love oneself a moral and spiritual demand to see oneself as the image and likeness of God?

St. Paul said, "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" (II Cor. 3:18). We spiritually love ourselves as we recognize "the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49) as our original identity. By loving ourselves, we humbly recognize that we embody God's gracious qualities.

The good Samaritan parable (see Luke 10:30-37) provides a practical example of loving our neighbor as ourselves. The account tells of a Jewish man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho who was robbed, brutally beaten, and abandoned. Three travelers—or we could say, three types of thought--came upon the scene. The first traveler, a priest, was so occupied with his own full plate of daily tasks that he took no time to investigate the stranger's need. We could say he represents self-absorption, busyness, maybe even self-righteousness.

The second man, a Levite, did stop. Was he afraid to become involved, fearing that the responsibility would overwhelm him? Whatever his reasoning, the Levite left without even a word of encouragement. This type of thought we might call indifference.

Then the Samaritan arrived. The Samaritan represented a higher--a spiritual--view. Although Samaritans and Jews were enemies, this Samaritan didn't see this man as an enemy. He saw a fellow traveler in an emergency. The Samaritan bound up the man's wounds, poured on oil and wine, lifted him onto his donkey, and took him to an inn. The Samaritan paid for the man's care and promised to stop on his return to settle up whatever additional expenses might be incurred.

I like to think of the Samaritan as well prepared, beginning his journey with ample supplies, adequate transportation, money to pay for his own lodging, and extra funds to cover emergencies. He probably didn't stop to help every traveler on the road, but when he saw an emergency, he was prepared to help.

Metaphorically, the oil and wine the good Samaritan poured into the man's wounds might represent heavenly inspiration and spiritual understanding (see *Science and Health*, p. 592, 598). The cloth the Samaritan used to bind up the wounds could represent the undivided garment or the whole Christ, always present to heal and save. Lifting the injured man onto the animal to carry him could be symbolic of lifting another's thought to accept God's loving, gentle care.

This parable doesn't indicate that the Samaritan went into debt to help the injured man or neglected his own responsibilities. Accepting progress as the law of God, the Samaritan could go on his way knowing that divine Love would continue to provide for the man's well-being.

As with the Samaritan, expressing unselfed love for our neighbor comes from our own spiritual growth and preparation. We don't need to overcome all of our own problems before we're ready to help another. But we do need to love God, to love what is good in ourselves, and to identify good in others.

Mrs. Eddy advised in *Science and Health*, "In mental practice you must not forget that erring human opinions, conflicting selfish motives, and ignorant attempts to do good may render you incapable of knowing or judging accurately the need of your fellow-men" (p. 447). Loving God with all our mind prevents erring human opinions from determining our actions. Loving God with all our heart prevents us from having selfish motives. Loving God with all our soul, or in other words, spiritual sense, keeps us from misguided attempts to do good.

Although the following parable is rarely mentioned in conjunction with the story of the good Samaritan, I think the message of Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (see Matt. 25:1-13) supports this lesson of wisdom and love. In this parable only five of the virgins wisely took extra oil for their lamps as they waited for the bridegroom. When the other five ran out of oil, the wise women did not share theirs but recommended that the others go and get their own. While this might appear unkind or uncharitable, a deeper look shows the metaphorical significance: the wise virgins recognized that spiritual growth,

wisdom, and devotion of thought can only be attained by each individual's own spiritual preparedness.

Both parables urge us to be spiritually prepared. The story of the virgins shows us that each individual must cultivate spiritual sense. No one can do it for you. The good Samaritan parable shows how our spiritual preparedness can help others in human emergencies.

We are all worthy of Love's blessings. As St. Paul writes, "For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want" (II Cor. 8:13, 14). As we take these lessons to heart, we can be the loving, unburdened good Samaritans of Jesus' teachings.

Elise Moore, a Christian Science teacher, also lectures around the world on Christian Science in both Spanish and English. She and her husband, David, split their time between Nashville, Tennessee, and Tucson, Arizona.