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Staying Aloft

By Elise L. Moore

When Elise Moore was six years old, she knew what she wanted to be when she grew up. As she tells it, "I remember sitting on the curb, talking to my friend, saying I wanted to be a Christian Science practitioner like my aunt."

Later, in college, she was planning to attend law school. But she realized one night at a Christian Science testimony meeting that she wanted to practice divine law rather than study human law. "I was visiting a church in California," she says, "and a woman told of a healing she'd experienced as a result of realizing that it was law, that healed. And it all clicked for me."

Over the next few years, Elise helped people through Christian Science while she worked in marketing and sales. She was praying about how to transition full time into the public practice when, she says, "Suddenly I met David, the man who is now my husband of 23 years. He asked me to marry him after two days." They married a month later. "I told him my heart's desire was to go into the public practice of Christian Science healing. He wasn't a Christian Scientist at the time, but he said, fine. And that's just what I did."

Elise began advertising her practice in this magazine in 1985, and became a teacher of Christian Science in 1997. She and David have homes in Nashville, Tennessee, and Tucson, Arizona. In 2005, Elise joined The Christian Science Board of Lectureship, and now travels throughout the United States, giving talks on the subject of Christian Science in both English and Spanish and to a wide variety of groups, churches, and community organizations. When she's not traveling, lecturing, or spending family time with children and grandchildren, Elise's great passion is to go birding with David. Their trips have ranged from across the US to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. But, as she says, her greatest joy is in helping others discover and experience the healing power of the Christ.

In the *Manual of The Mother Church*, Mary Baker Eddy instructed members to pray daily for themselves.¹ Why do you think praying every day for yourself is necessary?

That's a question I used to ask myself when I was a teenager. It seemed to me that if you prayed once and got it right, you wouldn't have to pray again.

And I began to think about this question as it relates to atonement. In the Old Testament it says

that the high priest offered the atonement for the sins of the people once each year.² Yet, the New Testament says that offering this atonement was done once with Christ Jesus, and that it was so effective the first time that one didn't need to do it again.³ And I thought, well, that applies to daily prayer. If you truly have the Christlike view of something, then you shouldn't have to constantly pray about it, either everyday or once a year.

And actually I still think about that because I want to make sure that the reason for my daily prayer is not that I think prayer is ever ineffective. The entire purpose of prayer is to change one's thought and actions to align with divine Principle, with God. And truly, if we do that, then the prayer is effective, and we don't have to pray over and over on the same topic. So, back to the question, Why pray daily? Two reasons: First, to align ourselves with the Divine; and second, to maintain that position.

The key, then, is to continuously keep one's thought in alignment with divine Principle? I like to think of it this way: Prayer is analogous to adjusting your position to the rotation of the earth. If you always want to be in the sunlight, you can't keep your feet planted firmly on the ground, because as the earth rotates, you're going to be in the dark some of the time. It's not your fault that you're in the dark; it's simply that the earth, or in my analogy, world thought or general human belief, has rotated and turned you away from the sun, or from the light of a true understanding of God and His creation—the light of the Christ.

However, if you can become airborne in a plane, then you're freed from the rotation of the earth. And as long as you stay aloft, you can remain in the sunlight, or by analogy, in the light of the Christ, 24/7. If you lift up from the earth, then all you need is fuel to stay aloft. And, to me, that fuel is daily prayer. So I think of daily prayer as the spiritual fuel that keeps my thought from just going along with general, mortal beliefs, which are sometimes good and sometimes not good.

Let's say you're praying for the world. So if you prayed on Monday—and even though you've really put your whole heart into it—is the problem that by Friday all the thought-forces of the world have turned you away from your alignment with divine Principle, with God?

There are infinite ideas in divine Mind, so each day I demand of myself a new view of, for example, the "Daily Prayer" or "A Rule for Motives and Acts," both of which are in the *Church Manual*⁴ I assume that the prayers I did yesterday and last week and last year were extremely effective, but I'm demanding of myself a fresh view.

Let me give you an example. One time I was praying and thinking about "A Rule for Motives and Acts." And on that day, for the first time I suddenly flipped it and had a new view of this sentence: "The members of this Church should daily watch and pray to be delivered from all

evil, from prophesying, judging, condemning, counseling, influencing or being: influenced erroneously” I saw that it also meant that no one could prophesy erroneously about *me* or judge *me* erroneously or condemn *me* erroneously. You know, for years when I prayed about this, for some reason I was just praying not to judge, prophesy, or condemn other people. But on that day, it just became immediately clear that no one could prophesy, judge, condemn, counsel, or influence *me* erroneously.

So, as I said, divine Mind has infinite ideas, which is the reason it's possible to have fresh ideas every day. And, to me, that's what makes prayer effective. That's also what keeps you aloft—that's the fresh fuel. And it's not so much that there's a pull of the world to pull you back down to the ground—that's not it. It is that we cease fueling ourselves. Or we don't take up enough fuel. And, frankly, if you're going to stay aloft continuously, you need to learn how to refuel in the air. You don't have to wait until you don't have a whole lot of inspiration and land on the ground. That's when we say, "Guess I'd better start praying again and refueling." We need to learn how to refuel in the air while we're still aloft, still inspired.

You know, with jet fighters it is precise coordination that enables a pilot to refuel while flying. And refueling in the air does take skill and practice, and is a more advanced type of flying than simply learning how to take off and land. But let's challenge ourselves. When we're first learning about spiritual things and prayer, we're not going to think, Oh, I have to stay aloft the whole time. We might be doing well just to get off the ground for a few seconds. But once we've been doing this for a while, why are we still thinking in the model of, "I pray for myself in the morning, or three times a day, or whatever, and then land"? Why don't we think of a model where we stay aloft and refuel in the air by challenging ourselves continually to have fresh inspiration about familiar passages?

The second thing we need to do is to look at situations not just as human or physical, but to see the divine shining through. For example, I think a lot about what Mrs. Eddy explained as the "Scientific Translation of Immortal Mind," which is the absolute truth about God and His idea, man, including each of us. And also, the "Scientific Translation of Mortal Mind," which describes the human condition. In this passage, Mrs. Eddy wrote about what she called the three degrees: The First Degree is the physical, the Second Degree is the moral, and the Third Degree is the spiritual.⁵ Now starting in the spiritual degree, we find all the qualities of God and man, with not a single element of error in any of them. And what's beautiful to me is that we include these divine qualities right now.

The Second Degree, the moral, has wonderful qualities—humanity, compassion, affection, honesty, and so forth. I like to think of the moral as the bud that we nurture until it blossoms into the full flower of the spiritual or divine. In one sense the spiritual qualities include the Second Degree moral qualities. In other words, spiritual understanding, which is the Third

Degree, includes faith and hope. But it is possible to be aware of the moral qualities, for example, to have faith and hope, and yet not quite be at the place where we're grasping spiritual understanding. That's why we need to nurture the moral in order to recognize and see the divine. The divine is there, but we might not be seeing it. In the First Degree, the physical, we find all the things we don't want any part of—the darkness that we don't want to rotate into. It's the envy, jealousy, resentment, hatred, or negative things going on. And it's through prayer—getting aloft—that we learn to recognize divine Love in the spiritual qualities shining through. It's the wisdom, spiritual understanding, health, harmony, integrity, and other spiritual qualities that we already include. And then we begin to be able to refuel in the air.

Elise, let's talk about how one might take this view, getting aloft, to pray for church.

One of my favorite ways to pray for Church is to begin with this passage from Mrs. Eddy's book *Pulpit and Press*: "Christian Scientists, their children and grandchildren to the latest generations, inevitably love one another with that love wherewith Christ loveth us...." And then the passage gives four qualities of that Christly love: "...a love unselfish, unambitious, impartial, universal,—that loves only because it *is* Love. Moreover, they love their enemies, even those that hate them. This we all must do to be Christian Scientists in spirit and in truth." And then Mrs. Eddy said: "I long, and live, to see this love demonstrated. I am seeking and praying for it to inhabit my own heart and to be made manifest in my life." Finally she asked: "Who will unite with me in this pure purpose, and faithfully struggle till it be accomplished? Let this be our Christian endeavor society; which Christ organizes and blesses." ⁶ That's my favorite definition of Church. To me, "Christian endeavor society" means a commitment to faithfully love with "a love unselfish, unambitious, impartial, universal." That's what I pray about daily to do—to love like that.

Another way I pray about Church is to go to the definition of man in *Science and Health*. ⁷ And I read the entire definition substituting *Church* for the word *man*, which then takes me to this sentence: "Jesus beheld in Science the perfect [Church, which] appeared to him where sinning mortal [church] appears to mortals. In this perfect [Church] the Saviour saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of [Church] healed the sick." I pray with this every day. And then the passage continues, "Thus Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is intact, universal, and that [Church] is pure and holy." We can also substitute other words in there, such as *Readers*, *board members*, and *committee members*. I really feel that the correct view of the Readers would help heal the whole congregation.

Let's talk about how you pray for the practice and for your patients.

I love to use Bible verses when I pray. One of my favorite verses in praying for the practice is in Colossians. The passage begins: "We... do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and

increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." ⁸ So I'm praying that the patient will be filled with the knowledge of God and spiritual understanding. And that he or she will be strengthened and delivered and transformed.

Have you ever had a time during your years as a healer where you have felt discouraged?

I don't know that I'd use the word *discouraged*. Sometimes you have to work harder because sometimes you feel like you're swimming upstream. You know, if you're in a stream and you're going along with the current, it's a lot easier than when you feel that you're the only one, and all force of thought is going the other way. Sometimes you just feel that you're working so diligently, but you're not making a lot of progress.

You mean on an individual case or just overall?

Sometimes both. That's when I think of one thing—get out of the stream. I don't want to be just floating along with general mortal beliefs and have that feel easy. At the same time, I don't want to feel like I'm the salmon swimming upstream against all of this pressure of mortal mind. It just wears you out. So get out of the stream. And what I mean by that is, get out of the stream of mortal mind and plant yourself in divine Mind. And when you do that, you don't feel the aggressiveness of mortal thought trying to push on you. So if you feel like you're swimming upstream, get out of the stream and get into divine Mind.

Do you have a specific example of how that has worked practically in your own life, Elise?

When my mother passed on a couple of years ago, I was very close to her and was intimately involved with her physical care. So I just felt the need to step aside for a little bit. I felt very rooted to the ground, and I needed to get aloft again. There's a difference between feeling a sense of freedom with spiritual reality and feeling like you're just hanging on to spiritual reality. I was hanging on.

So my husband and I went to Peru for three weeks. I needed to think about God and me. We went birding through the Amazon. We were really remote, spending all day, from sunrise until dark, birding. Birding is a very quiet activity with hours of silence. And I used all this time to just commune with God. This wasn't a time of reading. Not all inspiration is reading. In fact, I've found that so much inspiration comes from my direct communion with God and just considering spiritual ideas that are precious to me, and turning to God with the questions that are troubling me. For these several weeks of birding and hours of silence while looking at beautiful and wonderful things, I was able to work through the thoughts that were disturbing me.

This time was precious, because in that third week I was actually able to have a communion with God that for me was breaking into new mental territory, into ideas that I had never

considered. Not because I had a problem and I was searching for an answer, but because I was stepping forward into considering spiritual concepts that I usually didn't have time to explore.

We were walking in a bamboo forest area in the Peruvian Amazon, and I suddenly had this incredible clarity of God as Love. It's difficult to put into words because it wasn't so much a word, per se, but this sense of divine Love being way more than my human love— of my human love being a pin prick in the immensity and the universality of divine Love. And this lifted a tremendous burden I didn't know I had.

How did this mental breakthrough and consecrated prayer affect your practice?

I think what it did was help me see more clearly that the prayer that heals is a recognition—a recognition that God is doing the healing. I know we say that all the time, but I understood more than ever that when we pray for patients, what we're seeing is God loving them. And all we're doing is simply acknowledging that. And we can't get in the way of it.

That makes me think that a Christian Science practitioner must have a lot of humility. But how do you distinguish between humility, which is a positive quality, and a necessary quality, and being merely self-deprecating?

Well there's no relationship at all. Self-deprecation is when you see the negative. Humility is when you recognize those spiritual and moral qualities we talked about.

Real humility is when you recognize what is good about you and acknowledge that God is the source of that good. But humility is not about going on a witch hunt for sin. You're just like an original musical composition, where there's no wrong note written into that composition. To go with another analogy, it doesn't mean that if you're playing a perfect composition, or singing it, you might not *make* a mistake by hitting a wrong note. But you don't dwell on that mistake because it's not in the original. When you're recognizing that the original composition (you) is composed by God and is perfect, there's humility in that.

Any last thoughts, Elise?

Simply this: Before praying specifically about a problem, try to have a clear sense of God's presence and power. One first has to shift the foundation of thought to spiritual reality. Otherwise, we feel like we're doing a lot of work and wearing ourselves out with prayer, when actually we haven't lifted off yet. We're on the racetrack of mortal mind zipping around, but we need to get off that track. Lifting our thought to the spiritual reality is what is most important. Then we can pray specifically from this higher altitude and demonstrate God's healing power.

¹ See *Manual*, P. 41. ² See Ex. 30:10. ³ See Rom. 5:11. ⁴ See *Manual*, pp. 40, 41. ⁵ See *Science and Health*, pp 115-116. ⁶ *Pulpit and Press*, p. 221. ⁷ See *Science and Health*, pp. 475-477. ⁸ See Col. 1:9-13