

Reprinted from the Christian Science Sentinel, March 21, 2011.  
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## *Blessed not depressed*

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In a survey released by the Harvard Medical School and the World Health Organization in 2007, Americans were the least happy among the 14 countries surveyed. Depression among Americans was over 18 percent while in Nigeria, which had an average per capita income of less than \$250 a year, there was almost no depression, less than 1 percent (The Wall Street Journal, March 9, 2007).

Perhaps Nigeria has fewer winter storms and more sunshine. Maybe communal living relieves loneliness. Maybe there's less conversation about hereditary depression or chemical imbalance. Perhaps societies less focused on consumerism feel less guilt and angst over past decisions. Or maybe Americans have gotten happier in the past five years. Regardless, you don't need to move to Nigeria to be happy. Wherever you live and whatever you have done or not done, your life can be restored right where you are.

Those who struggle with depression might feel beyond the reach of hope. In Bible language they might feel "poor in spirit." The word poor can also be translated as "depressed in mind and circumstances." So the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt 5:3) could be considered as a promise that the depressed in spirit may expect to find blessing.

How can the depressed be blessed? We don't need to seek out troubles so that we can feel better after we overcome them. Nor is happiness sweeter when preceded by adversity. Being blessed is feeling the gentle breath of God whispering away the fear and fog. God's grace is breathing hints of hope into the remotest corners of our frozen spirit. The Divine tenderly resuscitates right thinking, right action, right progress. Like a balloon filled with warm air, the divine influence lifts and buoys the fabric of our life. Then we rise from earth's lethargic grip toward new views.

The blessing is the renewal of spiritual views of ourselves and of others. Man and woman are truly the divine creation of the one good, God. Men and women are not specks in a vast universe. We are not insignificant ants toiling endlessly, only to be ignored and unrewarded.

Every aspect of God's vast creation is significant. Each right thought, word and deed is recognized and rewarded by God. The universe of God's creating is the endless expression of intelligence. Each good idea is important. Every identity is valued and has purpose. Like notes in a musical scale extending into ranges beyond physical hearing, every note has a place and purpose, eternally established and permanently productive.

You are the blessed, important, crucially significant idea of God. Your identity is part of the harmony of divine creation breathing a song of praise. You don't need to escape into another state or plane of existence. Harmony includes you right now. The eternal continuity of spiritual harmony maintains each individual as an active, contributing participant.

Christ communicates this more spiritual view of life which saves from depression and grief. Christ is the divine message from God to humankind, lifting the heart from earth toward heaven. We don't need to die into a state of heavenly peace and harmony. We live our way into eternal life, moment by moment.

Each moment can be a gift from God, offering an instant of insight and peace. In this very moment, God is speaking a word of forgiveness. In this moment, God is removing a hurt feeling. In this moment, God is changing a thought to let go of the past. In this moment, God is reassuring that Truth is more powerful than a lie. In this moment, God is saving from fear. In this moment God is working changes in human character. The action of divine Truth is at work deep in the heart of humanity and within one's own heart, healing the holes and smoothing the rough places.

Jesus promised salvation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). This would include salvation from the fog of depression. It might be helpful to spiritually interpret this verse, "Blessed are the depressed, for they are truly governed by health, harmony, and holiness."

The kingdom of heaven is life in the conscious awareness of God's harmonious government. It is a mental place of effortless thought and action. Heaven is neither here nor there as a physical locale (see Luke 17:21). Jesus promised we would find this kingdom of God within us. Perhaps Jesus was encouraging those feeling trapped in human circumstances that the hope of healing and well-being was within their grasp. Mary Baker Eddy commented on Jesus' words: "This kingdom of God "is within you," — is within reach of man's consciousness here, and the spiritual idea reveals it. In divine Science, man possesses this recognition of harmony consciously, in proportion to his understanding of God" (p. 576:12).

God is the Spirit of truth and love, revealing the spiritual dimension of life. The spiritual and good are already within us. This doesn't mean the spiritual is confined within matter, but rather safe within reach of our understanding and comprehension. God created each individual able to understand their spiritual identity. No child of God can lose their divine identity or fall from God's grace and care. No circumstance or violent eruption can rend the fabric of God's universal love. Your identity is intact. Your place in God's kingdom is reserved and preserved for you. No one else can take it. No mental darkness can prevent you from claiming your spiritual heritage and origin. Love's tender mercy breathes the sweet assurance of wholeness.

One semester in college, I became depressed. Was it the workload? The dark winter days and bitter cold? Confusion about relationships or lack of them? Or was there no reason at all, and was I unthinkingly picking up negative mental influences like random radio waves crackling through the air of human thought? Whatever the reason, I felt ineffective, overwhelmed and unable to do anything about it. I called my dad for advice. (He had told me that the study of Christian Science had enabled him to graduate top of his class.) I wanted his spiritual insight, as I felt none too clear. As I told him about the lack of time, feeling overworked, and some of my worries, he was quiet. Guilt-ridden, I admitted I couldn't seem to find time to study the weekly Christian Science Bible Lesson or pray for myself.

Instead of launching into a pep-talk or telling me where I'd gone wrong, he quietly considered the situation, praying. Then he told me something so unexpected, it caught my attention. Dad asked what I thought Jesus did while he traveled between cities. I supposed he prayed. My dad agreed that while Jesus was traveling, he would have used that opportunity to think

about God. Instead of pondering what might be ahead or going over and over the conversations of the past, Jesus would have praised God and affirmed the power of God in the present. I saw how that would prepare him for the tasks ahead and resolve any problems left over from the past.

Then Dad asked how long it took to walk to my first class. Then between classes, to lunch, etc. We went through my entire schedule for the next day and discovered almost 2 hours where I was walking or pausing between activities. This was an opportunity to think about what I already understood of God and God's creation.

I began to use those moments to consider the supremacy of good, the power of divine intelligence, the calm and peace of spiritual reality. Day after day, I took advantage of those moments to affirm that God was in control.

Progress was gradual. I had to persist in being spiritually proactive instead of humanly reacting to doubts and fears. The final flash of light that dispelled the depression happened when I almost flunked a final. The teaching assistant asked what had happened. Before I could answer, he said that I had such a high grade going into the final that the result would still be a high C or B.

Suddenly, it was like I completely woke up from a torpid state and a mental fog evaporated. All along I had been silently berating myself, thinking I had been doing poorly. That was never true. I had been doing well. But I accepted a lie about myself, and perhaps a lie about school and societal pressure and acted accordingly. I realized I didn't have to fight my way out of a depressing hole. I had never been in a hole in the first place. It was the thought that I was in a hole that I'd been struggling against.

More clearly than ever before, I realized that thought is our experience. It's not the circumstance that determines our direction. It's our thought about the circumstance. Perhaps this doesn't sound like a desperate situation or major revelation to anyone else, but it was life-changing for me.

The updraft of inspiration is lifting you on wings of Love. God truly is governing thought and action, regardless of physical appearances. The peace, health, and harmony that you seek is only one thought away. So we can make it our next thought in this moment and feel the "calm, strong

currents of true spirituality” (see *Science and Health*, p. 99) sweep us gently onward and upward.

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