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When the teacher isn't right

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.B.

A third-grader loses a creative writing contest. Instead of pointing out a few strengths in the story, her teacher shrugs and explains she just isn't a creative writer. Jamie spends the rest of her school years believing this.

Jamie's teacher didn't mean to limit her. I'm sure she said thousands of helpful and encouraging words in the classroom. Unfortunately it was this negative statement that Jamie (not her real name) remembered.

The point isn't to blame adults for kids' perceptions. Jamie didn't have to believe she was incapable just because somebody else said it. Your view is yours. It isn't your teacher's view or your mother's view or the coach's view. What you think about yourself and how you act is up to you. But if you think negative things about yourself, you can change how you think any time.

Jamie really had to face her fear of creative failure in her senior year of high school. She was taking Advanced Placement English in order to get ready for the AP exam.

A good score meant college credits at most universities. Jamie really wanted those credits. She had worked hard in English all through high school. She was actually looking forward to the exam until she heard that one half of the grade rested on a creative writing component. Students were expected to write a fictional story on a topic given to them when they walked into the testing room. Jamie's confidence collapsed. There was no way she could write a creative story.

She felt so hopeless that she decided the only thing to do was to pray to God. Maybe He would help her feel less afraid. Day after day Jamie prayed. But nothing happened. She was still afraid, and now she was discouraged.

But what did God think?

Then one day Jamie realized why her prayers weren't working. She was starting all wrong. Here she was asking God to help her, but then she was canceling her prayers by believing that she was uncreative and incapable of writing fiction. She was praying one thing and thinking another. Who said she couldn't write? A third-grade teacher. But what did God think? That was a new question. All these years she had believed her teacher, but she'd never bothered to ask God.

How do you ask for God's opinion or advice? It's possible to quiet your thought, ask God a question, and then listen for an answer. And Jamie did that sometimes. But this time she decided to turn to God's Word. God's Word is the Bible, and the place where Jamie had found the spiritual meaning of God's Word was in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy. Jamie read these books regularly. She earnestly believed that inspired writers heard God's revelations and recorded them for humanity. The books weren't fiction, but they were the highest level of creative writing... true inspiration.

The freedom of Soul

This is the quote she found in Science and Health: "Mind is not necessarily dependent upon educational processes. It possesses of itself all beauty and poetry, and the power of expressing them. Spirit, God, is heard when the senses are silent. We are all capable of more than we do. The influence or action of Soul confers a freedom, which explains the phenomena of improvisation and the fervor of untutored lips" (pg. 89).

Wow, what an eye-opener! God created her able to express creativity. It didn't depend on education or talent or even practice. It was a natural gift from God. God was informing her that she was capable of much more than she had done before. And God, divine Soul, would give her freedom of expression. She could improvise. She could paint beautiful word pictures with the poetry of divine Mind.

Confidence, inspiration, creativity

Self-doubt dropped away. Creativity didn't depend on her ability. It was God's influence and action. Jamie was confident that she could and did express the inspiration of Mind, the freedom of Soul, the creativity of the Creator.

When the day arrived for the AP exam, Jamie trusted that God knew and would communicate every idea she needed. When the time came for the creative writing component, Jamie read the topic. She closed her eyes and silently turned to God. She didn't ask for ideas or even think a thought.

Now was the time to be silent and listen to creative Mind. She listened for divine improvisation, and instantly an entire three-part story filled her mind. The complete outline, the names of the characters, the movement of plot from lust to morality to unselfed love was all there. Jamie opened her eyes, picked up her pen, and started writing. There were no erasures, no cross-outs. She had never written this way before. And she received the highest score and 15 English credits, a full semester at the university she attended the next year.

Now it's your turn to think new thoughts about yourself, to see what God has to say about your ability. "We are all capable of more than we do."