

A black and white photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, there are several tall, thin trees, some of which appear to be dead or have lost their leaves. The middle ground shows a valley with a river or stream winding through it. The background consists of rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky.

FERN LODGE FOCUS - April 1996

By faith Abraham, when he was called
to go out into a place which he should
after receive for an inheritance, obeyed;
and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Hebrews 11:8

What is Christian Science nursing? — Anna Lisa McVey

Let's look at this timely, simple, profound subject. Christian Science nursing is care which is consistent with the theology of Christian Science. The essence of this care is a Christian Science nurse's joyful witnessing to the present truth that God loves, cares for, and heals man. The practice of Christian Science nursing is a living commitment to what Jesus had to say about loving your neighbor.

In response to a lawyer's question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*, Jesus referred to the law, and asked how the lawyer understood it. He responded in essence, "Love God supremely, and your neighbor as yourself," and then he asked Jesus, *and who is my neighbor?* Our Master's answer was the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

Christ Jesus is our wayshower. He saw a direct relationship between eternal life and brotherly love. He also noted that being a neighbor involves care of a practical sort—a demonstration of divine Love that meets human needs. The teachings of Jesus, along with his example of constant care in practical ways for his followers, form the inspiration, basis and authority for Christian Science nursing. Because God, Love, cares for His beloved child, we also care for our fellow man.

When Mary Baker Eddy established her Church on the Rock, Christ, she recognized the vital importance of Love-made-practical. She included in her *Church Manual* a by-law which sets standards for Christian Science nurses and the care they give. What might Christian Science nursing care look like? It may look like bathing, feeding, walking, providing for a balanced sense of rest, activity, study—giving whatever assistance is needed with daily living activities. It may include cleansing and covering wounds. That sounds good and noble, one might say, but my neighbor up the street who works in a convalescent hospital does just the same things, and in a kind way. What's the difference?

The difference is crucial. It has to do with the very premise on which care is being given. The widely-held view, even of loving care-givers, is that man is biological in nature, a mortal who is subject to laws of physics, genetics, environment, age. Matter is seen as the ultimate authority, and material measures are believed to be the means for correcting problems—material man, material solutions.

The nature of man, viewed through the lens of Christian Science, is the complete opposite of man-made-of-matter. Man is not material but wholly spiritual, intact, ageless, uninterrupted, uninvadable. He is subject to inexhaustible Life, undeviating Love, illimitable Mind, boundless Soul, changeless Principle, undiminished Spirit, eternal Truth. Health is not located precariously in a disintegrating body, but is forever anchored in Mind. When health is seen as a permanently reflected quality rather than as a physical phenomenon, it is removed from the realm of vulnerability to the security of Spirit.

How does this translate into a nursing practice? I learned a lesson from a difficult picture puzzle of the ceiling of the Sistene Chapel. As I was beginning to find the edge pieces, I remembered a question I had been asked by a patient. "Anna Lisa, am I going to make it?" I remember being able to reassure this dear one that of course she would "make it." Life is not precarious. There is no doubt about whether or not we continue to reflect always-present Spirit. Here's the connection with my Sistene Chapel puzzle. As I looked for the pieces to start with I knew that every piece was there. The solution was present, though presently unidentifiable by me. The outcome was certain. I had only to begin with what I could identify surely, and then build on that, piece by piece. In the same way we begin with our confidence that man is **now** the complete image and likeness of God. Then building on our faith and trust we are assured that life and health will be manifest in our experience. This kind of witnessing makes Christian Science nursing a joyous activity.

Ishmael and Isaac — Mary Jane Chapin

The January Bible talk on the story of *Abraham and Sarah*, presented by Mary Jane Chapin, a Bible scholar from Minneapolis, was informative and inspiring. We think you will share in the feeling of that day when you read these excerpts. We'll join the story in chapter 21 of Genesis, shortly after the birth of Sarah and Abraham's son, Isaac, and give accounts of the parallel stories of Isaac and his half-brother, Ishmael.

Thirteen years have passed since the birth of Ishmael. Remember back in the genealogy of Genesis 11, we were told that Sarah was barren. Later, when the promise of many descendants was made to Abraham, we felt tension in the story. How could a man whose wife was barren be the father of many descendants? It has been almost twenty-five years since Abraham was told to leave the land of his father and given the promise of many descendants.

Now the text says, And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. The birth of Isaac was announced twice, once to Abraham and once to Sarah, now the fulfillment is stated twice. This underscores its incredible aspect. This wasn't just a great event for Sarah even though it removed her barrenness; it removed her perceived curse among the people; it restored her to good standing, a right relationship with God. It did all those things, but it was absolutely essential for the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. Without Isaac, Abraham could not be a father of many descendants, and there would be no one to inherit the promised land.

But Sarah's joy was short lived. Things really fell apart on the day the child was weaned. A child was usually weaned around the age of three. It was a time marked by a great celebration which simply marked the fact that the child survived the first two or three years of life. On this very joyous occasion, Sarah found herself watching her son with his half-brother, Ishmael. She didn't identify him this way, instead she referred to him only as the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had born to Abraham. And then she used a very ambiguous term to say that Ishmael was mocking her son. The Hebrew word translated as mocking is a variation of the name

Isaac. Many translators, in trying to defend Sarah's forthcoming action, give this word a connotation that Ishmael was mocking Isaac, when in fact the text says that they were playing together. Yet it is exactly here that Sarah sensed danger, and she demanded that Abraham get rid of this bond woman and her son.

Abraham was grieved by Sarah's request, because it involved his son. We see a glimpse of Abraham's great love for Ishmael. But if Abraham had any doubts or concerns about the survival of Ishmael, he was able to put those fears to rest on the basis of God's promises. Once again, Abraham was obedient. He began early the next morning and provided provisions for Hagar and her son. We are told that she was given a skin of water, which is about 30 pounds of water. Now in point of fact, Abraham gave all this to Hagar. Her name was used. Some people see in this a powerful indication of his affection for her, his caring concern. She was no longer just an object, she was the mother of his child and to "send her off" was a lot gentler than to "throw her out" or to get rid of her. And they did go, and they did wander into the desert of Beersheba, moving in a southeasterly direction towards Northern Arabia.

Our story follows Hagar and her son and we are greeted with a poignant scene. Not surprisingly, the water ran out and the threat of death loomed large. The danger was greatest for the child. We are spared any description of their hours, perhaps days, of torment only to find them in desperate straits with Ishmael at the point of death. Hagar placed him under a bush, at least he would die in the shade. She moved some distance away and wept freely, by herself, emphasizing her loneliness and isolation. Hagar wasn't the only one crying, however, because the text also says that the

lad lifted up his voice and wept. It was his prayer that God answered. His name is Ishmael, meaning "God hears," and once again the angel of the Lord called to Hagar.

God gave Hagar several short imperatives. *Fear not... Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand.* Along with these demands, however, is a reiteration of the promise made in 16:10. Her child will not die because God will make him a great nation. The words of God's promise were followed by a practical intervention. He opened her eyes and she saw a well of water she hadn't noticed before.

There are additional points worth considering in this story. Perhaps the most wonderful thing is that God called out to Hagar by name. Unlike Sarah and Abraham who are very careful to not call her by name, God shouted out to her—"What's the matter, Hagar?" God didn't treat her like a slave. He treated her as deserving of His comfort and His protection.

Through no fault of her own Hagar was forced to separate herself from Abraham and his family. She and Ishmael still experience God's care and protection.

After all, Hagar was the recipient of the identical promise which had been made to Abraham, a promise of land and of many descendants. She was not an Israelite; she was not a man. Yet the promises were made by God, to her—a non-Israelite and a woman. We are impelled to consider that despite the human predicament, despite the attempts of humans to solve their problems on their own, and sometimes through ruthless methods, God has proven Himself gracious and dependable. He is faithful to all of His promises. He was faithful to Abraham and to Sarah in fulfilling the promises to

them that they would have many descendants, and He was faithful to Hagar in the same way. This is a story that celebrates the breadth and depth of God. God does not just hear the cry of His chosen people. He also hears and responds to the cries of the disinherited, the disenfranchised, the dispossessed, the defenseless, those who have been cast out.

From the story of Hagar, we learn tremendous lessons about God and about His ways with humanity. We must not limit our study of Biblical characters to the powerful, the forceful, and the influential. The story of Hagar demands that we consider the inalienable rights, the worth, of every individual. God's interest in Hagar was unwavering and profound. It is apparent that human hatred cannot thwart God's promises and ability to save. Hagar was guiltless, and her suffering did not go unnoticed. The actions of Sarah and Abraham coincided with God's long-term plans. Their ultimate concern was for the future of the covenant. But when we are alone with the story of

God and Hagar, alone with the divine perspective, then we catch a glimpse of true righteousness, and moral questions are answered. God's justice and compassion are absolute and unconditional.

Now let's consider Chapter 22 of Genesis. This chapter stands as the climax of the whole story of Abraham. God said to Abraham, *Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.* And Abraham rose early in the morning and proceeded with the intention of fulfilling God's order. Though the incident is held up as a great test of Abraham's faith, it is one that sends shivers down the spine of modern listeners. Such a demand is unthinkable; efforts to explain it away are unsatis-

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factory. How could God make such a request? How could a loving father agree to it, even if it did come from God? How do we hear this part of the story? Is there a message in it for us?

First of all, it is important to note that this story comes after Chapter 21. At that point the promises seemed to be fulfilled. Isaac was the only heir on the scene following the expulsion of Ishmael. They were living peaceably in the land of promise. For the most part, the promises seemed to be fulfilled. If we were reading this story for the first time and hoping for a happy ending, it should have come at that point. Life was good. They were at peace with their neighbors. They had adequate means, and Abraham and Sarah had the promised heir.

Yet, at precisely this point God tested Abraham. God called him by name, and he immediately responded, *Behold, here am I*. He signaled his readiness; his willingness and ability to do whatever was asked of him. This is the God that he has come to know over the past many years, the God that he trusts, obeys and loves.

The demand now followed. It consisted of three startling imperatives—**take, go, and sacrifice**. There was no ambiguity in the request. *Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest*. Each descriptive statement becomes more poignant, more tender, more personal. In a sense these words sum up the whole story so far. There had been a promise, a long delay, and a miraculous fulfillment. Now Isaac is the child of promise. And it is this child, the one Abraham loves, the one on whom all his hopes are riding, who is to be sacrificed.

It was an extraordinary test, both morally and theologically, because it was upon Isaac that the

fulfillment of God's promise depended. Yet Abraham made no response to God's request. He surrendered in total silence. He did not question the divine will, and that is quite striking considering his lengthy appeal to God in chapter 18 on behalf of the people of Sodom. But is it not possible that he learned something from that encounter with God? After all, it was Abraham who grew in his understanding of God. Perhaps, he truly realized that justice and mercy are, indeed, attributes of God.

Therefore, this is not a case of blind obedience. Rather it is an indication that Abraham had reached a level of maturity and obedience which enabled him to carry out God's commands, even though he may have questioned them in his heart.

As it is, early the next morning, Abraham rose, saddled his donkey, took Isaac, cut wood, and went. They traveled for three days. Finally in the distance, he looked up and saw his destination. Tension in the text heightens as Abraham deliberately made further prepara-

tions for the last phase of their journey. He took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it upon Isaac, while he took the fire and the knife. Silence must have continued for some time when suddenly Isaac exclaimed, *My father*, and Abraham responded, *Here am I*, the same response he made to God, and he added, *my son*. Father and son together. The relationship couldn't be more specific, nor more intimate.

Then Isaac asked, *Father, where is the lamb for a burnt offering?* The simple question is very penetrating. The answer seems self-evident. Has the awful truth begun to dawn on Isaac? Abraham answered, but his answer seemed evasive, ambiguous. *My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*. Is this hope, a prophecy, a prayer, or an expression of

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Ishmael and Isaac (continued)

faith? We cannot know the mind of Abraham, but it seems that an expression of faith is most consistent at this point in the story. And once again, the two walked off together, in mutual solitude—Abraham trusting the providence of God; Isaac trusting the intentions of his father.

When they finally arrived at the place, every detail is reported methodically. First an altar needed to be constructed. Then there were other preparations for sacrifice. Maybe Abraham was stalling, but at last the time has come, he must bind his son. It is at this moment that we know that Abraham was truly serious and intended to go through with it. Isaac was bound, and this confirms the impression that he was an unblemished sacrifice, ready to obey his father regardless of the cost it involved, just as Abraham was ready to obey God.

Abraham reached out his hand to take the knife to kill his son. This was a moment of great importance. Once again the text underscores their relationship as father and son. The unthinkable was upon them.

But we aren't the only ones following this scene. The heavenly audience is watching too. Precisely at the last moment an angel of the Lord called out Abraham's name, twice. And for the third time in the space of one short story, Abraham answered, *Here am I*. He has not swerved at all in this story; he has remained faithful throughout. The trial has ended, it will not go any further.

Whereas just moments before, Abraham put forth his hand to slay his son, the angel now said, *Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him*. Isaac is safe; the promise is safe. The tension is released. The angel continued, *for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me*. To fear God meant to honor him in worship and to live an upright life. It was not at all important that the act remained unfulfilled, because its value was deter-

mined by the intention of the heart. Indeed, it was not God's knowledge that was increased by this result, but rather Abraham's, and perhaps our own.

At that moment, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw... He had passed his test, and now he beheld an answer to Isaac's question, *where is the lamb for a burnt offering?* At that precise moment, a ram was caught in a thicket. Is it not possible that as Abraham lifted his eyes, as he raised his thinking to a more spiritual level, he perceived an answer heretofore unknown to him. He then named the place *Jehovah-jireh*, "the Lord will provide." Abraham had concrete proof of the Lord's provision. To be a God-fearing person is to be able to see and to grasp what God provides.

Our story does not end here. The angel of the Lord continued with a second summons from heaven, underscoring the importance of what was to be said. Because Abraham had not withheld his son, because he had been willing to sacrifice his posterity, because he was obedient, a blessing is freshly pronounced on him. The promises were renewed in ample form. First there was a promise of blessing, followed by a promise to multiply his descendants. The last blessing added that his descendants would possess the gates of their enemies. They would not live in the land as downtrodden people, rather they would experience the joy and prosperity of victory.



A complete audio tape of Mary Jane Chapin's program on *Abraham and Sarah* is available. If you are interested in purchasing a copy please contact Valerie Hickam at Fern Lodge.

In 1908, after 16 years at the lovely estate of Pleasant View in Concord, New Hampshire, Mary Baker Eddy pulled up roots and moved to Chestnut Hill, just a few miles from The Mother Church. In *Years of Authority* Robert Peel writes of her fondness for Pleasant View and says of her feelings on moving back to the Boston area, *Surveying the scene in which most of her life for the next three years would be lived, she exclaimed with the wry vigor of the Elizabethan she sometimes was, "O splendid misery!"*

Why, we may ask, didn't she stay in New Hampshire and live out a well-earned retirement? We can't know her specific reasons, but the question seems to bear on our topic, *Christian Science nursing and the Community*. To see how, let's consider what Mrs. Eddy did in her 3 years at Chestnut Hill. Among her many accomplishments during this time she abolished the Communion Service at The Mother Church, she established the *Christian Science Monitor*, and she wrote the by-law, *Christian Science Nurse* for the *Church Manual*. How might each of these actions urge members of the Church to reach out to include a larger sense of community?

When Christian Scientists attend Communion services in their own communities they demonstrate to a degree the understanding that we can commune freely with our Father-Mother God, individually and collectively, where ever we are. The *Christian Science Monitor* virtually demands that Christian Scientists reach out to embrace their communities with the healing touch of prayer.

Our world is in need of care. Nursing—nurturing and nourishing—that meets the practical needs of mankind while adhering strictly to the theology of Christian Science is the best possible demonstration of care. The tender, healing touch of pure Christianity offers the only real hope for progress in individual lives and among nations.

How important is it for us to offer nursing to a broad community? In Matthew 25 Christ Jesus describes the judgement, ... *then shall the King say... Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

Feeding, giving drink, clothing, visiting those in need, all these actions are commonly associated with nursing, and so it seems plain that nursing must be included in being a disciple of Christ Jesus. Remember that those the King is speaking to didn't believe they had served Christ, they just had helped their fellow man in a time of need. Yet they were assured, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Who are *the least of these my brethren*? In Matthew 12 Jesus says that whoever does the will of God is his brother. Are all who do the will of God Christian Scientists? Surely not. There is a need for Christian Science nursing in our communities that extends beyond our church memberships, and there is a blessing for those who help meet this need, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

The conclusion of our Leader's sermon *The People's Idea of God* points to the purpose and goal of Christian Science nursing in our lives and in our communities.

O Christian Scientist, thou of the church of the new-born; awake to a higher and holier love for God and man; put on the whole armor of Truth; rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation, —that ye may go to the bed of anguish, and look upon this dream of life in matter, girt with a higher sense of omnipotence; and behold once again the power of divine Life and Love to heal and reinstate man in God's own image and likeness, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Rediscovering the Hymns of Mary Baker Eddy

You are invited to a benefit program by Michael Taylor, C.S. of Mill Valley

Sunday, April 21 at 2:00 PM

at the home of Jane and Bill Vernon

3 Idlewood Place, San Rafael

Seven of Mary Baker Eddy's poems are in the *Christian Science Hymnal*. These poems were written over a period of thirty-one years, and they have brought comfort and healing to many.

During this program we will explore a range of questions, including:

- What synonyms for God are prominent and why?
- What phases of animal magnetism are handled?
- What word selections and word placements are found?
- How are Christian Science treatments offered?

You may send your donation to Fern Lodge or give when you attend the program. Michael Taylor has graciously offered to give this talk in other communities, too. We will announce the places and times in our next *FOCUS*.

Directions to the Vernon's home — 3 Idlewood Place, San Rafael, CA

From **Highway 101** take the **Central San Rafael Exit**. Go **West** on **Fifth Avenue** across San Rafael to H Street. Turn **Right** on **H Street** and continue until it ends at Forbes Avenue. Jog **Left** on **Forbes** to Fairhill Drive (100 yards). Turn **Right** on **Fairhills Drive** and follow the yellow line in the street (sharp left up the hill) to first left. Turn **Left** on **Idlewood Place**. Go to the cul-de-sac, turn around and park. The number **3** is on the gate.

FERN LODGE FOCUS — April 1996

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