



CHRISTIAN, SCIENTIFIC NURSING

Giving evidence of God's presence

By Margaret Rogers

WHEN I BEGAN WORK as a Christian Science nurse right after college, I fielded a lot of questions. In those days most Christian Science nurses still wore white uniforms, so when I rode the bus to or from the Christian Science nursing facility where I worked, other passengers would often ask me what to do about their stiff arm or about medications they were taking.

Then I'd explain that I was a *Christian Science* nurse, and worked with patients who used a completely mental and spiritual system of healing—no medication or physical therapy involved. A common next question might be, "Oh right, Christian Scientists don't go to doctors. So why do you have nurses?"

Frankly, that's a question I would have asked myself only a couple of years earlier. I was raised in a Christian Scientist family, and when illnesses or injuries happened, we would pray in the way Christ Jesus taught—"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" ([John 8:32](#)). From studying Christian Science I'd learned some of the fundamentals of the truth he was referring to:

- Our Father is Spirit, and we are actually spiritual beings—"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" ([John 3:6](#)).
- Seeking the understanding of God will take care of all needs—"Take no thought for your life . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" ([Matt. 6:25,33](#)).
- The divine Science of healing Jesus understood can be demonstrated today—"He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also" ([John 14:12](#)).

These points are central in the practice of Christian Science healing and nursing. When I was growing up, prayer based on these truths met our family's health needs. Sometimes we called a Christian Science practitioner to pray with us. If we were sick or injured, my parents provided the simple physical care we needed. I'd never met a Christian Science nurse until I was in college. One weekend I went to an informational workshop on Christian Science nursing that inspired me to take a summer job as a nurse's aide. The six years which I subsequently spent training and working as a Christian Science nurse provided some of the most demanding—and valuable—education I've received.

That education focused on practicing what it means to be Christian, and what it means to be scientific. People who rely solely on prayer for healing sometimes need practical care families can't give, and Christian Science nurses provide that. It's more than just physical care, though. I'd describe the heart of Christian Science nursing as *presence*. When sickness or other handicaps seem to deny God's presence, love, and help, nurses can give tangible evidence of that presence.

Nursing also gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to be scientific. One requirement for Christian Science nurses is that they have "a demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice" (Mary Baker Eddy, *Church Manual*, p. 49). This knowledge comes from an ongoing spiritual study and understanding of God as found in the Bible and in Mary Baker Eddy's writings. It includes the understanding that God causes only good and that whatever is not good has no power or reality to enforce it.

Scientific practice also involves close attention to how one's own thoughts affect a case. When I nursed, I saw evidence that conditions that appeared to be physical were actually mental in nature, and that spiritual ideas and attitudes have a healing effect on mind and body. For example, patients in pain from what looked like an obvious physical cause often felt quick relief when nurses read the Bible or sang hymns to them with love and conviction. This helped me understand that we were, as healers, ultimately dealing with thought rather than matter, and that divine Truth is powerful healing medicine.

Another name for this power of Truth is *Christ*. Christ is the divine message from God that He made everything spiritual and good and this message keeps coming to each of us until we accept that we are spiritual and good. Christian Science nurses have the privilege and joy of witnessing the Christ-presence with a patient, and practicing Christly qualities such as calmness, assurance, and love in the sickroom. Mrs. Eddy described this healing work well: "God's preparations for the sick are potions of His own qualities" (*Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896*, p. 268).

A nursing colleague of mine once told me that she prayed to know which qualities of God were particularly needed on a given case. If she had a patient who was discouraged or hopeless, for instance, she nursed that case by being grateful and cheerful. In doing so she gave evidence that God's goodness was present and so was the recognition of it. *Cheerful, orderly, patient, punctual, full of faith, receptive to Truth and Love* are qualities Mrs. Eddy mentioned in describing the ideal nurse (see *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 395).

A long-time friend of mine felt the healing power of those qualities when she entered a Christian Science nursing facility with severe internal bleeding. Many years after her healing, she still speaks with amazement about the joy and love the nurses showed her. Although she was in pain and required a lot of physical care, she says the joy the nurses expressed made her want to give back some of that love and gratitude. "The turning point," she told me recently, "was when I stopped thinking of the suffering and began thinking about all the nurses were doing for me with such unselfed love." She had a complete healing and says that the most memorable part of the experience was the nurses' joy and love.

How can one be joyful in the presence of apparent suffering? That's where the Christian and scientific aspects of nursing come in. Christianity includes faith that God is infinitely merciful and powerful to bring everyone's true wholeness to light. Like all committed followers of Christ, Christian Science nurses work to gain and maintain that conviction. The ability to express cheerfulness in the face of suffering begins with a willingness to deny self (the material appearance of

life) and acknowledge God's spiritual law of health and harmony as governing everyone right now. It includes the willingness and conviction to say to oneself, "No matter what I see, hear, feel, or smell, the scientific truth is that this individual is an immortal, spiritual idea whom God loves and maintains in perfection." Self-denial also involves sticking with a tough case and demonstrating the law of love by expressing compassion toward a patient even when your own inspiration—and patience —wears thin.

Following Christ is a scientific endeavor because it requires trusting what is scientifically proven, rather than what looks and feels true to the five material senses. Mary Baker Eddy discovered in the gospel accounts of Jesus' healings a body of proof that health is the real and permanent condition of creation and that it can be demonstrated to be present where sickness appears to be. Reasoning and praying to understand Jesus' teaching and live the Christ-spirit caused her to replicate in a remarkable degree his healing record. She encouraged and expected all students of Christian Science to follow that same example as they grew in Christliness.

Christian Science nursing is a vital aspect of healing. We are all called to be evidence of God's presence to others. The world owes gratitude to Christian Science nurses who accept this challenge quietly, humbly, and joyfully every day. CSS