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# A BETTER WAY

## How Ridiculous to Think That Love Could Be Compromised!

### How I Learned to Laugh at Misfortune

by Greg Mackie

We're all familiar with that famous passage from the Course that begins with this line: "Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh" (T-27.VIII.6:2). It is a highly metaphysical passage about how the dream of separation began and how it remains in place. But recently, I connected with the idea behind this passage—the idea that anything that appears to be contrary to God is utterly laughable—it in a way that I hadn't before. This has led me to a new practice in which I literally laugh at misfortune.

I'm sure this sounds strange and perhaps even inappropriate (and it would be inappropriate if done in the wrong way). But in fact the way I've learned to do this is practical, loving, and has had a big positive impact on my life. In this article, I'd like to describe this new practice of mine and the benefits it can bring us.

### Wrestling with misfortune

My journey to this new practice began with various misfortunes that occurred within a short period of time, including an unexpected tax bill and a fender-bender auto accident. I'm not doing especially well financially, so these events set me back a bit. In addition, a friend reported a tragic incident in which someone she knew lost her seven-year-old son in an auto accident caused by a drunk driver. Beyond these specific misfortunes, I do home care for the elderly, so I'm confronted with the ongoing misfortune of old age, suffering, and death every day. In short, I've been wrestling with misfortune. How could I use the Course to address this?

### A series of fortunate events

As I was wrestling with all this, a series of events and thoughts came to me that led me to a new view of all this apparent misfortune, and a new practice that reinforces this view. The following is a brief account of what happened.

#### *Nothing compromises love*

It started with a new insight by Robert, which he shared with our online Circle Course Community. The insight was a new understanding of the central idea of *A Course in Miracles*, an idea Robert summed up with a single sentence: "Nothing compromises love." Fleshed out a bit, the idea is this: God is a God of total love who created us totally loving and placed us in the totally loving environment of Heaven. We appear to have compromised this total love through separating and making a world of attack, suffering, and death. But all this apparent compromise is pure illusion, because nothing can really compromise love. At its heart, *A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path which teaches us the glorious truth that nothing compromises love. It aims to help us let go of all that seems to compromise love, so we can return to the awareness of the total love we never left.

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## WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

*A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

- ◆ Text : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.
- ◆ Workbook for Students: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.
- ◆ Manual for Teachers: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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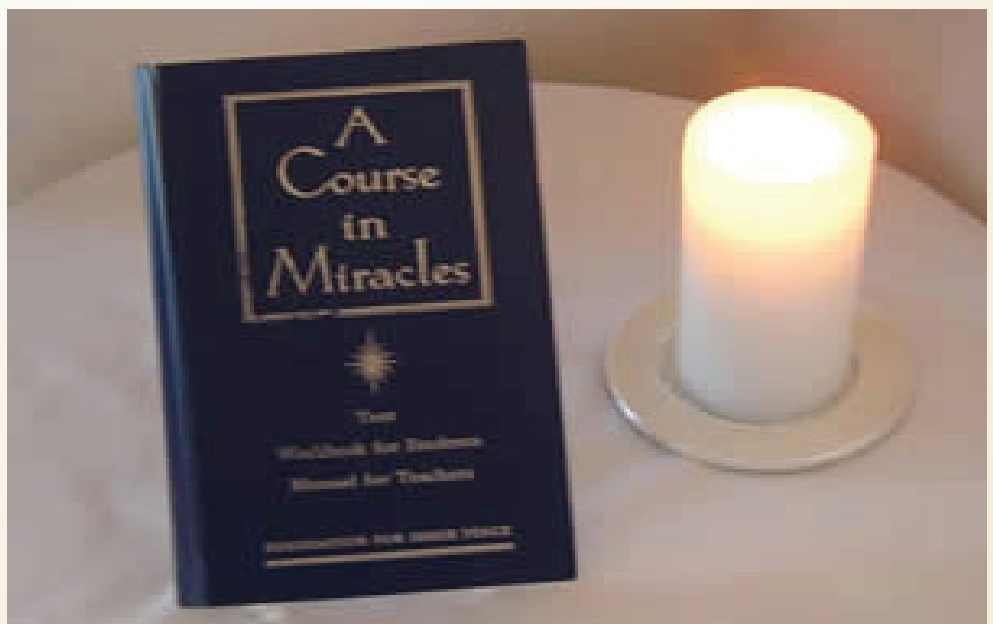
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## *The healing power of laughter*

The next step was going to an event at the Unity church I attend. The theme of this event was the healing power of laughter. The presenters shared with us some of the many healing benefits that laughter has on the body and mind. These benefits can apparently occur even with fake laughter, going through the physical motions of laughter without actually having something in particular to laugh about. The bulk of the event was devoted to exercises designed to get the group to laugh together: both genuine laughter at funny things, and fake laughter which, because laughter is contagious, often morphed quickly into the real thing.

### *Laughter in A Course in Miracles*

This got me to thinking: If laughter can bring healthy benefits to our bodies and minds even when we're faking it, how much more would it bring benefit if we really had something to laugh about—especially if it's something the Course itself wants us to laugh about?

This line of thinking brought to mind an article by Robert on laughter in *A Course in Miracles* ("[Laughing the World Away](#)," available on the Circle's website). In this article, Robert draws upon the Course's passages on laughter—including that "Son of God remembered not to laugh" passage—to present a picture of the Course's view of laughter.

A central point of Robert's article is this: We laugh when something that looks both important and rational—something that appears seriously real—is suddenly revealed to be trivial and nonsensical. The Course takes this basic idea and applies it to our whole experience of not only misfortune in this world, but of the world itself: It is all laughable because it stems from the "tiny [trivial], mad [nonsensical] idea" of separation from God. Therefore, to paraphrase the title of Robert's article, we can literally laugh the world away, because the whole idea of separating from God is a trivial, absurd joke.

### *It is a joke...*

Thinking about his article naturally reminded me of that "Son of God remembered not to laugh" passage, because this is what that passage is all about. It gained new life for me when I plugged in the ideas that I've described above.

The passage is saying, in essence, that nothing can compromise love, and the idea that anything *can* compromise love is totally laughable. The separation started when we had the "tiny, mad idea" that we could compromise love. In truth, that idea is totally ridiculous. "It is a joke" (T-27.VIII.6:5) to think that eternal Love could be compromised in any way. It is absurd to believe in "A timelessness in which is time made real; a part of God that can attack itself; a separate brother as an enemy; a mind within a body" (T-27.VIII.7:1). All of these things *would* compromise infinite love, so they cannot really exist.

Since the idea they could exist was a joke, what we should have done when it first arose in our minds was laugh and dismiss this foolishness entirely. But instead, we "remembered not to laugh"—in other words, we *forgot* to laugh. We forgot that the idea that love could be compromised is an absurd joke. This is why we groan under the yoke of this painful world and experience so many misfortunes: "In his forgetting did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment and real effects" (T-27.VIII.6:3).

Given how horrible things look to us now, it is very difficult for us to believe that nothing compromises love: "It is not easy to perceive the jest when all around your eyes behold its heavy consequences, but without their trifling cause. Without the cause do the effects seem serious and sad indeed" (T-27.VIII.9:4-5). It's like when someone pulls a cruel practical joke on you in which you are fooled into believing something terrible has happened to you. When you don't know that it's only a joke (the trifling cause), you are devastated by the apparent effects (heavy consequences).

But fortunately, we *can* learn to laugh again. We can realize that love truly cannot be compromised, and with Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's help, we can perceive the jest and laugh at both the trifling cause and its ridiculous effects. The passage ends with a practice in which we bring all the grim effects—the misfortunes of the world—to the Holy Spirit. He knows that their cause is nothing but the ridiculous, absurd thought that love could be compromised, and so they must be meaningless illusions. Once we learn this from Him, we can laugh them away with Him:

In gentle laughter does the Holy Spirit perceive the cause, and looks not to effects....He bids you bring each terrible effect to Him that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while. *You* judge effects, but *He* has judged their cause. And by His judgment are effects removed. Perhaps you come in tears. But hear Him say, "My brother, holy Son of God, behold your idle dream, in which this could occur." And you will leave the holy instant with your laughter and your brother's joined with His. (T-27.VIII.9:1, 3-8)

## My practice: “How ridiculous to think that \_\_\_\_\_ could compromise love!”

All of this came together in the practice I came up with, which is really a variation on bringing terrible effects to the Holy Spirit and laughing with Him at their trivial cause. It is a “response to temptation” practice which I apply to anything that appears to me to compromise love—all those “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” What I’ll do when something like that comes up is this:

- First, I’ll say some version of this: “How ridiculous to think that \_\_\_\_\_ could compromise love!” (I’ll invite the Holy Spirit or Jesus into my mind as I say this, asking Them to help me see its truth.)
- Then, I’ll expand on this idea in a way appropriate to the specific problem I’m dealing with.
- Finally, taking a cue from the event I attended in which I learned that I could fake laughter and turn it into the real thing, I will laugh at the absurdity of believing love could be compromised, laughing either internally (if I’m with other people) or externally (if I’m alone).

For instance, if an issue having to do with my financial lack comes up, I might say: “Jesus, how ridiculous to believe that something as trivial and insignificant as the amount of money in my bank account could possibly compromise love! God loves me, and has given me everything. In Heaven, I have *literally* everything. And even in this world, God has promised me that if I accept the function in salvation He’s given me, He’ll give me everything I need to fulfill that function. Even a loving human parent, with all of his or her human fallibility, would do that. How much more so does my infinitely loving Father do that! What a joke to think He could possibly do otherwise! Ha ha ha!”

I’ll enhance this process by using relevant lines and ideas from the Course. I actually did that in the previous paragraph (using versions of T-4.III.9:2 and T-20.IV.8:4). So with the money issue, I might use this line, which points out the absurdity of our belief that lack money would render us destitute: “You really think that you would starve unless you have stacks of green paper strips and piles of metal discs” (W-pI.76.3:2).

Whatever I use, I try to get in touch with the pure ridiculous absurdity of believing that the Love of God could be compromised. This is important, because the practice is much more powerful to the degree that the laughter is genuine. Fake laughter, after all, can only get you so far; if it were totally fake, it would be nothing but a form of denial. It is when my laughter is connected with real content, real meaning, that it becomes most effective. The better I can connect with the real absurdity of the idea that love can be compromised, the more genuine my laughter will be, and the more powerful the practice will be.

## The joy of learning to laugh at misfortune

This practice has had a major positive effect on me. I feel lighter, and more in touch with the part of me that really knows that nothing compromises love. It has enabled me to actually laugh at misfortune. I’m not quite sure why it has been so effective. It may have something to do with the fact that I have always enjoyed humor, and people have told me that I have a good sense of humor myself. I’ve always been amused by the absurd, and I’ve enjoyed comedy movies where people deal with humorous misfortunes (knowing, of course, that it was only a movie). So, this particular angle seems to fit my personality.

I think another reason this little “joke” I’ve created works for me is that the logic behind it really does make sense to me. I believe deeply that God is pure Love. This belief is not mere wishful thinking, but a conviction that has solid evidence behind it. I have felt God’s Love myself in a powerful way in my peak spiritual experiences. I have seen and heard convincing testimony from others who have had such experiences as well. Lately, I’ve been especially moved by the accounts of near-death experiences (like the one I’ll share below).

So, I have a deep, evidence-based conviction in the loving nature of God. And if God really is pure Love, a Love that is infinite and without the slightest hint of anything that is not love, it makes perfect sense to me that none of the unloving aspects of this world could possibly be real. It really is absurd to think that such things are compatible with God’s Love. So, something deep in me responds to this practice and says, “Yes, that *must* be so.” The whole idea of misfortune of any kind is indeed laughable.

Of course, just to clarify, when I speak of laughing at misfortune, I don’t mean laughing out loud at other people’s misfortunes, or laughing at the fact that they (or we) are experiencing suffering. Needless to say, the Course doesn’t want us to laugh at suffering in a mean-spirited way. It tells us that God Himself weeps at the fact that His children are experiencing suffering (see T-5.VII.4:5), however illusory it may be. It calls us to be kind to all, and to be truly helpful to our suffering brothers in whatever way the Holy Spirit directs.

Nor is this kind of laughter intended to forcibly bludgeon unpleasant feelings into submission. It’s not a way of “stuffing” or inappropriately denying what is going on for us, though it could certainly be misused that way. Rather, it is a way of gen-

tly but firmly shining the light of truth upon whatever feelings we are experiencing. The purpose of this practice for me is simply to bring my mind to a place where I can recognize the ultimate triviality and unreality of suffering in the grand scheme of things, even as I compassionately address and alleviate it on a worldly level. I've found that this has actually enabled me to be far more effective in being truly helpful, especially with the elderly people I work with.

### **Can we really learn to laugh at *any* misfortune?**

A question naturally arises when contemplating this practice: It may be great for fender-bender auto accidents, but could this really work for bigger misfortunes? How far can this laughter go? We all know the Course says there is no order of difficulty in miracles, so it's safe to say that as far as Course theory is concerned, this practice would work for literally anything. All misfortunes are equally illusory, and therefore equally unable to compromise love. They are thus all equally laughable in the end.

But can we find real-life examples of people experiencing this realization in their own lives? I recently read about a near-death experience (NDE) that provides a powerful example of how this can really work. A pregnant woman named Ann had an NDE while giving birth to her child, Tari. During her NDE, a radiant being of light told her that he would come to take the child back with him in four days. In other words, Ann's child would die.

Normally, of course, this would be the most devastating news imaginable to a new mother having her first child. But rather than feeling distressed, Ann had an amazingly different reaction:

“My child?” I asked, scarcely believing able to contain my joy and happiness over the news that one of my own children would be going back with *him!*

She later describes the “sheer joy” of the being of light's message as “the greatest moment I have ever known.”

Sure enough, Tari was born apparently healthy but soon sickened and died. The nurse brought Ann the dreadful news, and what happened next boggles my mind every time I read it:

“Are you okay?” she [the nurse] asked.

“Yes,” I told her much too calmly under the circumstances. “This is the fourth day!” (I felt *joy!*)

In the weeks following, I felt no grief of my own loss, but felt sorry for my friends and relatives who didn't know where Tari was, and couldn't believe—really believe—that my “experience” [the NDE] was anything more than a vivid dream.

Ann says she had to “pretend” to grieve the loss of Tari in public, just so people wouldn't think there was something wrong with her.

Later in her life, her husband and son also died young, but her experience with Tari softened the impact of these losses as well. People told her she was in shock at the time of the incidents and would grieve more later. Later, when they saw that grief wasn't forthcoming, they said she must be so strong to be able to bear so many hard losses. But she had a very different explanation for her calm in the face of so much apparent misfortune:

Neither statement was true....They aren't dead. They are all alive, busy and waiting for me. Our separation is only temporary and very short, compared to all eternity. (*Lessons from the Light*, by Kenneth Ring, pp. 260-61)

Wow! Here is a case of a person who had perhaps the worst misfortune anyone could have—the loss of a child. On top of that, she later lost her husband and another child. To say that it appears love is compromised here is a dramatic understatement. Indeed, such a series of apparent tragedies would lead many people to seriously doubt that there could be a loving God at all.

Yet because of her NDE, Ann recognized that these misfortunes weren't really what they appeared to be. Love was not compromised; in fact, in her eyes, love was gloriously affirmed by these events. I can easily imagine her saying, “How ridiculous to think that these seeming deaths could compromise love!” And given the joy she describes, I can easily imagine her laughing at her apparent misfortune. I am truly amazed that such a thing is even possible. Maybe there really isn't any limit to the degree of misfortune we can laugh away.

### **How about you?**

Most of us haven't had an NDE, so it may be more of a challenge to really take to heart the same realization that Ann

did. Of course, we shouldn't feel guilty if it takes us time to get there. As we wrestle with the many misfortunes of life on earth, we may go through a lot of grieving on the way to the light. But I think the testimony of experiences like Ann's and the assurances of *A Course in Miracles* itself give us solid reasons to believe that we can at least move in the direction of that light.

So, given the immense potential benefits of remembering to laugh, I'd like to recommend that you try my new practice yourself, and see if it works for you. When you experience some misfortune in your life, large or small, invite Jesus or the Holy Spirit into your mind and say some version of "How ridiculous to think that \_\_\_\_\_ could compromise love!" Expand on the idea in a way that helps you really get in touch with it and connect it to your specific situation. Finally, laugh inwardly or outwardly, whichever is more appropriate. It's okay if that laughter feels fake, especially at first, but try to make it as genuine as possible by really getting in touch with the ridiculousness of your situation from the perspective of the Course's view of what is really real.

I hope that with me, you can come closer to really being able to laugh at misfortune. After all, if we truly do believe in a wholly loving God, how could misfortune be real? If God is truly Love, then it really is ridiculous to think that love could be compromised. Why not live and laugh as if that were really true?



E-mail your comments to the author at: [greg@circleofa.org](mailto:greg@circleofa.org)

Greg Mackie has been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He writes Course Q & A's and "Course Meets World" articles for the Circle of Atonement's website, and is one of the co-leaders of the Circle Course Community. He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

### Circle Mailbox

*Here is some feedback we received on Robert's article in A Better Way #101, "Forgiveness: The Recognition of Inestimable Worth."*

Your article on forgiveness is just wonderful. And it is truly right on. Thank you for extending God's love in such a beautiful way. I love the Course and I so treasure articles like yours. Blessings to you.

— *Jane Walling*

• • •

I offer my gratitude for your continuing efforts at helping to bring Jesus' message of forgiveness ever closer to full awareness. Holy Spirit needs your voice for now, till we can all hear Him clearly. Many of us are benefiting, so rest in the gratitude, my brother.

— *Michael Stanford*

## New Beginnings

I have some big news to share. At the end of this month, Nicola and I are moving ourselves and our two small children to England. Our place in the Circle will remain unchanged. With the ease of telecommuting these days, the change will be so negligible that, if we didn't announce our move, no one would notice the difference.

Further, the Circle's location in the downstairs of our home here in Sedona will also remain unchanged. In fact, our move is opening up new possibilities for the Circle's forward movement here, as I'll describe below.

It took us a long time to make this decision. For various reasons, it became clear to us that life for our family, and especially our two small children, would be better in England (where Nicola is from). Yet this seemed to go against years of guidance that affirmed that the Circle would build something here in Sedona. Our guidance had repeatedly spoken of us establishing a "little garden" here, an oasis in the desert where people would come to experience healing and immersion in the Course, and would then leave carrying the light they had taken in.

After months of seeking, we finally received guidance that, miraculously, wove both sides together. It said that Nicola and I should go to England and that a woman named Amy Speech, who is active in our Circle Course Community, would be "moving to Sedona to build community for the Circle." Such an option hadn't occurred to us, but it did make sense. Amy has been quite possibly the most passionate and active member of the Circle Course Community, involving herself in everything that happens in the community. Soon after the CCC was launched, we named her membership facilitator, simply because she became such a connecting point for the community's members. She, in fact, seemed like a much better choice to build some sort of community here than Nicola and I, who are up to our necks in child rearing.

Now, as the house is almost packed up, the wisdom of that guidance is becoming more and more apparent. Amy arrived here on May 15 from Syracuse, New York. She will be living upstairs and working downstairs as our new office manager.

Amy will be joined in the house by another long-time Circle student. Veronica Vaughan is actually our *longest-time* student. She came to our first class here in 1994 and then, for a number of years, hosted our classes in her home. Several years ago, Veronica and I went through a process of seeking guidance about her life and came to the conclusion that she was meant to live at and play host for a future Circle retreat center.

And now it looks like an initial version of that guidance is finally coming true. Veronica, with help from Amy, will be hosting the guest room here in the house, which will be open for anyone wishing to visit, but will also be available to be used as private retreat space (if you are interested, here's a [link](#)).

Our hope is that this is the beginning of what the guidance has spoken of for the Circle here: a kind of miniature little garden, with long-term residents joined in the Circle's vision, the Circle's office here, and retreat space for those who want to immerse themselves in Course study and practice. We hope that it can grow from there into what the guidance has spoken of for so long.

Recently, this picture just got even richer. Greg Mackie, who has been living in Atlanta since early 2009, has decided that he will return to Sedona this September and move into a downstairs room in the house. So at that point, one of our Circle teachers will be living here, adding a key component to our budding little garden.

It really feels like something is trying to take root and grow here. And it just took Nicola and me (and our little ones) to get out of the way! Of course, I will be traveling back periodically for Circle events. And who knows what might develop in England, where there are several Course teachers who are deeply committed to the Circle. So please send us your best wishes on May 31 as we board the plane and head off to a new life in England. And send those same wishes here to Circle HQ and Amy and Veronica and eventually Greg, as they attempt to anchor a living community around the Circle's vision of the Course.