



**CONTENTS**

<u>Why Are You Not Rejoicing?</u>	
<u>The Spirit of Celebration in the</u>	
<u>Historical Jesus and</u>	
<u><i>A Course in Miracles</i></u>	
<u>by Greg Mackie</u>	1
<u>Circle Mailbox</u>	9



# A BETTER WAY

## Why Are You Not Rejoicing?

### The Spirit of Celebration in the Historical Jesus and *A Course in Miracles*

by Greg Mackie

Everyone loves a good celebration. But why? If we are honest with ourselves, we may come to realize that underneath at least some of our love of celebration is a depressing idea: Life is, as Thomas Hobbes famously put it, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” We celebrate the good things of life precisely because there’s so much that’s bad; our celebrations are often nothing more than a brief respite from the suffering of everyday existence in this dog-eat-dog world.

But what if we could tap into a spirit of celebration that is *truly* celebratory, a celebration of life that rests upon the firm foundation of a truly happy reality? This is the spirit of celebration that runs through the teachings of Jesus, both in his earthly life and in the pages of *A Course in Miracles*. Inspired by a class Robert prepared for a historical Jesus group I belong to, I’ve been deeply taken with this whole theme of celebration, and have tried to incorporate a more celebratory spirit into my daily life.

In this article, I would like to draw out the theme of celebration in the historical Jesus and in the Course, and hopefully help you catch the spirit as well. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if every moment of our lives were transformed from constant anxiety about what the world will do to us next to a constant moveable feast in which we celebrate the eternal love and generosity of God? This is the kind of life Jesus holds out to us, both in the gospels and in the Course.

### **Celebration in the teachings of the historical Jesus**

In the class I mentioned, Robert’s notes pointed out that the theme of celebration runs throughout Jesus’ teachings in the gospels. For instance, there is the theme of celebrating the return of the lost to the Kingdom of God, illustrated in the parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost (prodigal) son:

When she finds [the lost coin], she invites her friends and neighbors over and says, “Celebrate with me, because I have found the silver coin I had lost.” (Luke 15:9)

Once you get home [after retrieving the lost sheep], you would invite your friends and neighbors over, and say to them, “Celebrate with me, because I have found my lost sheep.” (Luke 15:6)

“Let’s have a feast and celebrate [the return of my lost son]. After all, this son of mine was dead but has come back to life; he was lost but now has been found.” (Luke 15:23-24)

The Kingdom of God is also depicted as a feast of plenty, to which all who hunger are invited:

Blessed are you who hunger, for you will have a feast. (Luke 6:21)

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*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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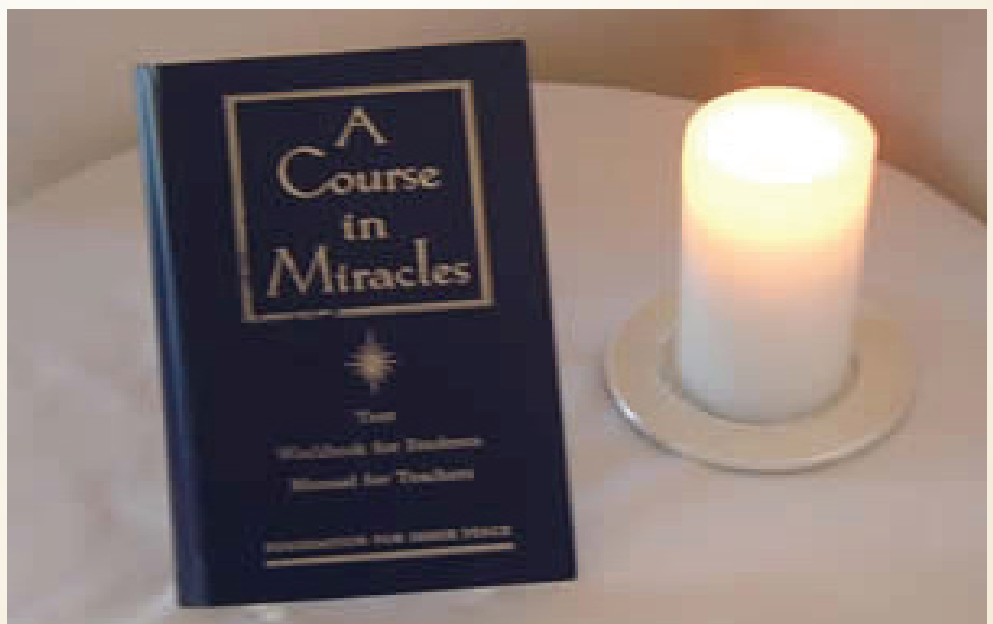
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Go out on the roads and whomever you find, invite [to my feast], so that my house may be filled. (Luke 14:23)

What exactly was Jesus trying to illustrate through these parables and images? One traditional answer is that when God ushers in His Kingdom through the apocalyptic destruction of the present evil order, those who suffer now (if they are Christian) will have cause to celebrate. In this view, Jesus was saying something like, “Celebrate, you poor, oppressed people, because in the coming apocalypse you’ll be exalted and the oppressors will get their just deserts.”

But many modern scholars believe that Jesus was not proclaiming a future Kingdom ushered in by God’s apocalyptic intervention. Rather, he was proclaiming a Kingdom that is available right here and right now, a Kingdom that can be experienced in the present. As a saying of Jesus from the Gospel of Thomas puts it, “The Kingdom of God is spread all over the earth, but men do not see it” (Thomas 113). So, when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom, he was inviting his hearers not to wait for God to bring about the end times, but to see the world in a new way.

In this view, being in the Kingdom is the recognition that reality is governed not by the cruel vicissitudes of an oppressive world, but by the unlimited love and extravagant generosity of our Father in Heaven. This, then, is a different kind of celebration than we’re used to. Normally, as I mentioned earlier, we celebrate the good things that happen as a brief respite from the omnipresent reality of suffering in this world. But the celebration Jesus was calling for is the celebration of a different reality: the benevolent rule of a God who showers His bounty upon us as He feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field. We are celebrating the fact that reality is *not* cruel; we are celebrating the loving nature of *true* reality.

This is a striking teaching, especially considering the audience to whom Jesus was speaking: poor peasants under the oppressive yoke of Rome and its collaborators among the Jewish elite. These people had little outward reason to celebrate; their lives were full of suffering and challenges. But here was Jesus, one of the poor and oppressed himself, coming to these people who seemingly had everything against them and saying, “Celebrate because God loves and cares for you *right now*. The Kingdom is here even in the midst of apparent oppression and suffering. Open your eyes and hearts, and celebrate the fact that the Kingdom has come.”

Thus, he was calling upon his followers to celebrate right then and there, whether their current suffering had abated or not. True, there was also a sense in his teaching that the suffering of the oppressed *would* eventually be relieved through God’s love and generosity. After all, we have beatitudes like the one above—“Blessed are you who hunger, for you will have a feast”—which most scholars now believe referred originally to literal hunger, etc.

But they didn’t have to wait to celebrate. They could celebrate right now both God’s current care for them (a celebration which could include celebrating specific events as reflections of the Kingdom), and His promise that in the end, all things would be set right—not through the apocalyptic intervention of God, but through human beings extending God’s love and generosity to others as He extended it to them, living His Kingdom on earth.

### ***Celebration in A Course in Miracles***

That same spirit of celebration runs through the pages of *A Course in Miracles*. It is a major theme. In what follows, I will not try to capture everything the Course says about celebration. (The specific words I looked up in my research were versions of “celebrate,” “rejoice,” and “be glad.”) I just want to capture its essence, its flavor. The Course offers some truly exhilarating words of celebration and rejoicing; see if you can capture the sheer exuberant joy in these words. This is good news indeed!

### ***Celebration in Heaven***

The Heaven described by the Course is an eternal celebration, a veritable feast of Love. We see this especially in references to the “song of Heaven,” the joyous singing of God and the entire Sonship in celebration of Their eternal Love and the ongoing extension of that Love through the act of creation. This passage from *The Song of Prayer* captures beautifully the eternal prayer of rejoicing of Heaven. It is

the single voice Creator and creation share; the song the Son sings to the Father, Who returns the thanks it offers Him unto the Son. Endless the harmony, and endless, too, the joyous concord of the Love They give forever to Each Other. And in this, creation is extended. God gives thanks to His extension in His Son. His Son gives thanks for his creation, in the song of his creating in his Father’s Name. The Love They share is what all prayer will be throughout eternity. (S-1.In.1:2-7)

What a glorious picture! If you were experiencing this every moment, could you do anything *but* celebrate?

### ***Celebration on earth: We're always celebrating something***

Of course, we all know what happened according to the Course: our minds checked out of the party in Heaven. We fell asleep, made a false identity called the ego, and now seem to be living in a physical world, enduring those solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short lives Hobbes spoke of.

Yet it seems that we brought our penchant for celebrating with us when we dreamed up this world. In a striking passage, the Course says, “Perception’s basic law could thus be said, ‘You will rejoice at what you see because you see it to rejoice.’” (T-25.IV.2:1). What a fascinating idea! It is a twist on the idea that projection makes perception, the idea that we see what we want to see. What it means is that we choose to see things precisely because we want to rejoice in them, we want to celebrate them.

So, we are always looking for reasons to celebrate, and always finding them. True, a lot of the things we see don’t *seem* to be causes for celebration; indeed, we may outwardly regard them as things to hate or fear or attack or lament. But according to this idea, whatever we see in the world, we see because deep down we regard it as a cause for celebration, even if we are not consciously aware of that.

But just what exactly are we looking for? What do we regard as cause for celebration? That depends on what we choose to identify with: our egos, or our true Identity as God created us, the Identity at the heart of everything the Course wants us to celebrate.

### ***The ego’s celebration***

If we identify with the ego, we will celebrate everything it celebrates. And this is very bad news for us, for the ego celebrates everything that binds us to it and the vicious world of pain and suffering it made. This is a celebration of hell.

What specifically does the ego celebrate? Among other things, it celebrates fear: “Fear is a witness to the separation, and your ego rejoices when you witness to it” (T-4.I.10:2). It celebrates the body and calls upon its followers to do the same: “Its sad disciples chant the body’s praise continually, in solemn celebration of the ego’s rule” (T-19.IV.B.16:3). Above all, it celebrates our brothers’ sins, which better than anything else uphold our specialness, the “prize” that motivated us to check out of Heaven’s party in the first place. This dark celebration, the Course tells us, is the cause of all our pain:

When peace is not with you entirely, and when you suffer pain of any kind, you have beheld some sin within your brother, and have rejoiced at what you thought was there. Your specialness seemed safe because of it. And thus you saved what you appointed to be your savior [specialness], and crucified the one whom God has given you instead. (T-24.IV.5:2-4)

This is a chilling picture, but it accurately describes the things we tend to celebrate, does it not? We don’t like fear, but don’t we in a sense celebrate it as the thing that ensures our safety? It goes without saying that we love celebrating and glorifying the body in myriad ways. And though we don’t usually like to admit it, we love tearing down our brothers by focusing on how (apparently) “sinful” and deserving of condemnation they are compared to us. And all of this is done to preserve our precious specialness, our fiercely defended belief that we are *better* than anyone else.

So much of what we celebrate, then—even in spiritual circles—is a celebration of the ego. When we glory in killing Osama or our six-pack abs or just what amazingly special people we are, we are buying into the ego’s game. I’ve always been deeply struck by this passage from the *Psychotherapy* supplement, which tells of how our distorted perception can make us think that the ego’s dirge of death is the song of Heaven itself:

The strange distortions woven inextricably into the self-concept, itself but a pseudo-creation, make this ugly sound seem truly beautiful. “The rhythm of the universe,” “the herald angel’s song,” all these and more are heard instead of loud discordant shrieks. (P-2.VI.2:1, 5-6)

When Jesus speaks of celebration in the Course, then, he’s not suggesting that we should just celebrate anything and everything. We don’t want to celebrate the loud discordant shrieks as if they were the herald angel’s song. We want to make sure we are celebrating things that are truly worth celebrating, things the Course would have us celebrate.

## *The Course's celebration*

What would the Course have us celebrate? In essence, the Course would have us celebrate the exact opposite of what the ego would have us celebrate. So, since the ego celebrates everything that binds us to it and the vicious world of pain and suffering it made, the Course would have us celebrate everything that releases us from the ego's world of suffering and returns us to God.

What specifically would the Course have us celebrate? Here, I will put a selection of celebratory Course passages into three broad categories that I have found personally helpful. Each category represents a reversal of the way we normally think, a way the Course turns an aspect of life we normally lament into something we can celebrate.

I encourage you to get into the spirit of celebration in these passages. Don't just read them as teachings. Instead, I invite you to use them as a kind of exercise, a way of getting in touch with the glad tidings Jesus has for *your* life. As you read, apply what is being said to you personally, and imagine how you would celebrate if you really believed it is true.

### *Celebrating the glory of who we really are as God created us*

We normally think that who we really are is hardly worth celebrating. We lament the seeming fact that we are so full of faults, impurities, and imperfections. To reverse this, the Course would have us celebrate the glory of who we really are as God created us—the luminous true attributes given to us by our loving and generous Father. All of our true attributes—love, peace, invulnerability, limitlessness, etc.—are something to celebrate. But here are a few specific examples that the Course specifically names as causes of celebration:

- Our oneness with God and all our brothers: “We thank our Father for one thing alone; that we are separate from no living thing, and therefore one with Him. And we rejoice that no exceptions ever can be made which would reduce our wholeness, nor impair or change our function to complete the One Who is Himself completion.” (W-pI.195.6:1-2)
- Our true Identity, and all the gifts that Identity gives us: “Today we will again give thanks for our Identity in God. Our home is safe, protection guaranteed in all we do, power and strength available to us in all our undertakings. We can fail in nothing. Everything we touch takes on a shining light that blesses and that heals. At one with God and with the universe we go our way rejoicing, with the thought that God Himself goes everywhere with us.” (W-pI.124.1:1-5)
- Our shared grandeur: “Your grandeur will never deceive you... You cannot triumph, but you *are* exalted. And in your exalted state you seek others like you and rejoice with them.” (T-9.VIII.7:6-9)
- Our innocence: “Minds that are joined and recognize they are, can feel no guilt. For they cannot attack, and they rejoice that this is so, seeing their safety in this happy fact. Their joy is in the innocence they see. And thus they seek for it, because it is their purpose to behold it and rejoice.” (T-25.IV.1:1-4)
- Our holiness: “Father, my holiness is Yours. Let me rejoice in it, and through forgiveness be restored to sanity. Your Son is still as You created him. My holiness is part of me, and also part of You. And what can alter Holiness Itself?” (W-pII.285.2:1-5)

### *Celebrating the fact that we cannot change the glory of who we really are as God created us*

We normally think that even if we ever were something worth celebrating—maybe when we were innocent, newly born babies—everything we've done since has tarnished us beyond redemption. We lament the seeming fact that our actions have permanently tainted and corrupted us. To reverse this, the Course would have us celebrate the wonderful fact that we haven't been able to change our glorious true attributes given to us by our loving and generous Father. “You are as God created you, not what you made of yourself” (W-pI.93.7:1). Here are a few examples of this theme:

- “Rejoice, then, that of yourself you can do nothing. You are not *of* yourself.” (T-8.VII.6:1-2)
- “You who cannot even control yourself should hardly aspire to control the universe. But look upon what you have made of it, and rejoice that it is not so.” (T-12.VIII.5:4-5)
- “The laws of God can never be replaced. We will devote today to rejoicing that this is so. It is no longer a truth that we would hide. We realize instead it is a truth that keeps us free forever.” (W-pI.76.7:1-4)
- “Today, let us resolve together to accept the joyful tidings that disaster is not real and that reality is not disaster. Reality is safe and sure, and wholly kind to everyone and everything. There is no greater love than to accept this and be glad. For love asks only that you be happy, and will give you everything that makes for happiness.” (T-16.II.8:5-8)

## *Celebrating the fact that we have the means to remember the glory of who we really are as God created us*

We normally think that, even if on some deep level we are still good and pure, we don't have the means to really recognize that and come home to God. We lament the seeming fact that there is such a gulf between what spiritual teachings like the Course tell us we are and our actual experience of ourselves, a gulf that seemingly can never be bridged. To reverse this, the Course would have us celebrate the fact that we have the means to recognize the glory of who we are as God created us — the gulf *can* and *will* be bridged. We will awaken! We will come home to God! Here are some examples of specific means of awakening the Course would have us celebrate:

- The Holy Spirit as Teacher and Guide: “Love leads so gladly! As you follow Him, you will rejoice that you have found His company, and learned of Him the joyful journey home.” (T-13.VII.6:3-4)
- Christmas as a symbol of everyone's release from suffering: “This Christmas give the Holy Spirit everything that would hurt you. Let yourself be healed completely that you may join with Him in healing, and let us celebrate our release together by releasing everyone with us.”
- Easter as a symbol of everyone's release from suffering: “Let us not spend this holy week brooding on the crucifixion of God's Son, but happily in the celebration of his release. For Easter is the sign of peace, not pain.” (T-15.XI.3:1-2, T-20.I.1:2-3)
- Our Workbook practice (a theme seen in multiple lessons): “Let us be glad to begin and end this day by practicing today's idea [‘Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world’], and to use it as frequently as possible throughout the day. It will help to make the day as happy for you as God wants you to be. And it will help those around you, as well as those who seem to be far away in space and time, to share this happiness with you.” (W-pI.62.4:1-3)
- Our power to choose happiness over suffering: “The cause of suffering is in your mind. Be glad indeed it is, for thus are you the one decider of your destiny in time. The choice is yours to make between a sleeping death and dreams of evil or a happy waking and joy of life.” (T-27.VII.9:2-4)
- Vision: “Your brother's sinlessness is given you in shining light, to look on with the Holy Spirit's vision and to rejoice in along with Him. For peace will come to all who ask for it with real desire and sincerity of purpose, shared with the Holy Spirit and at one with Him on what salvation is. Be willing, then, to see your brother sinless, that Christ may rise before your vision and give you joy.” (T-20.VIII.3:1-3)
- Forgiveness: “What joy there is today! It is a time of special celebration. For today holds out the instant to the darkened world where its release is set. The day has come when sorrows pass away and pain is gone. The glory of salvation dawns today upon a world set free. This is the time of hope for countless millions. They will be united now, as you forgive them all.” (W-pII.241.1:1-7)
- The real world: “You maker of a world that is not so, take rest and comfort in another world where peace abides. This world you bring with you to all the weary eyes and tired hearts that look on sin and beat its sad refrain. From you can come their rest. From you can rise a world they will rejoice to look upon, and where their hearts are glad.” (T-25.IV.3:1-3)
- The holy relationship: “Think of the loveliness that you will see, who walk with Him! And think how beautiful will you look to each other! How happy you will be to be together [in your holy relationship], after such a long and lonely journey where you walked alone. The gates of Heaven, open now for you, will you now open to the sorrowful. And none who looks upon the Christ in you but will rejoice.” (T-22.IV.4:1-5)
- Our special function: “Be glad you have a function in salvation to fulfill. Be thankful that your value far transcends your meager gifts and petty judgments of the one whom God established as His Son.” (W-pI.123.3:4-5).
- Being truly helpful to others: “The truly helpful are invulnerable, because they are not protecting their egos and so nothing can hurt them. Their helpfulness is their praise of God, and He will return their praise of Him because they are like Him, and they can rejoice together. God goes out to them and through them, and there is great joy throughout the Kingdom.” (T-4.VII.8:3-5)
- The miracle: “You are entitled to miracles because of what you are. You will receive miracles because of what God is. And you will offer miracles because you are one with God. Again, how simple is salvation! It is merely a statement of your true Identity. It is this that we will celebrate today.” (W-pI.77.1:1-6)
- The fact that God's plan for salvation cannot fail: “It is senseless for me to search wildly about for salvation. I have seen it in many people and in many things, but when I reached for it, it was not there. I was mistaken about where it is. I was mistaken about what it is. I will undertake no more idle seeking. Only God's plan for salvation will work. And I will rejoice because His plan can never fail.” (W-pI.86.1:2-8)

It is very clear that Jesus, both in his earthly life and in the Course, really wants us to “go our way rejoicing” in every moment of our lives, to live in a permanent state of celebration.

Indeed, notice how similar these Course passages are to the spirit of celebration in the historical Jesus material I presented earlier. (There are even images in the Course reminiscent of those gospel “feast of plenty” images: see T-19.IV.A.16 and T-28.III.8-9.) Here, too, we don’t celebrate brief, lucky respites from a painful reality. Instead, we celebrate the fact that the painful reality is *not reality*. We celebrate the nature of true reality, governed by a loving and generous God. We celebrate both the happiness this reality can give us right now, and God’s promise that because of this reality, external conditions will eventually change too.

How would you feel if you really *knew* that all this is true? If the Course is correct, all of this really is true, right here and right now. Therefore, “Why are you not rejoicing?” (T-29.II.3:5).

### **Practical application of this spirit of celebration**

As I said earlier, I’ve really been captured by this idea. What I’m getting out of it is that no matter what is happening externally, I can be in a constant state of celebrating the reality of God’s Love. I’ve been trying to live my daily life in this celebratory spirit, repeating some of the inspiring passages above and reminding myself every chance I get that I have so much to be grateful for. I’ve tried to carry this spirit with me in everything I do. And while I still have my ups and downs, it is making a positive difference. It is truly helping me to live a happier life, and is also helping me to be more effective in extending love and happiness to others.

To help myself better embody this spirit of celebration, I’ve been reflecting on a few practical questions. For instance: What is the relationship between this spirit of celebration and specific events and external situations? On the one hand, there is a sense in which our celebration is independent of external situations: It is celebrating God’s Love no matter what, even in the midst of apparent trials and tribulations. It is an expression of present happiness regardless of what is going on around us, the happiness exemplified by Jesus even as he was on the cross.

But on the other hand, I think that inherent in our present celebration is a celebration of the fact that because of God’s Love, external situations *will* change eventually—we will not be stuck in trials and tribulations forever. God’s Love will indeed take positive forms here on earth as we awaken to that Love: “The happy dream about [your brother] takes the form of the appearance of his perfect health, his perfect freedom from all forms of lack, and safety from disaster of all kinds” (T-30.VIII.2:5).

Ultimately, our celebration is a celebration rooted in our trust in God “to set all things right; not some, but all” (M-4.XI.1:4). It will likely take time for that to happen, but precisely because we trust in God to set all things right, we can celebrate even while we are waiting for that: “Those who are certain of the outcome can afford to wait, and wait without anxiety” (M-4.VIII.1:1). However long it takes, as the famous anthem of the civil rights movement tells us, “we shall overcome someday.” So, in our celebration we can both rejoice in God’s Love even in the midst of our present trials, *and* rejoice in the fact that because of God’s Love, eventually those trials will melt away.

Another practical question: How do we express this spirit of celebration in our interactions with others? The most basic answer, of course, is that we should ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. That being said, some general ground rules do come to mind. Above all, I think we do so by example, simply by letting our happiness and love overflow in our interactions with others. In our Jesus class, one person shared how the exuberant daily happiness of one traffic director transformed the attitudes of drivers who were upset with the endless road construction in Sedona. While everyone else was complaining, he was celebrating life, and his happiness was infectious. He was so inspiring that the local paper wrote a story about him.

I think we can find all sorts of creative ways to celebrate things that reflect the glory of God’s Kingdom. For instance, in that same Jesus group, one thing we’ve done is hold events where we celebrate a particular person on a day other than his or her birthday. In these celebrations, each attendee would simply share positive things about this person: feelings of love and friendship toward this person, good and loving qualities seen in him or her, ways this person has positively impacted the life of the person sharing and other people—in short, things to celebrate about this person. These events have been very powerful and moving, even life-changing.

When others share good news that truly reflects their experience of God’s Kingdom, of course we can celebrate with them. As the Manual says, “For those already willing to change their minds [the teacher of God] has no function except to rejoice with them, for they have become teachers of God with him” (M-5.III.1:4). But what about those who share bad news? What about those who are currently suffering? How do we express this spirit of celebration with them? Of course we aren’t going to say, “Your wife just died? Good thing it’s all an illusion—let’s celebrate!” What, then, *do* we say and do in these situations?

Each situation will be different, but I think in these cases what we essentially do is express our spirit of celebration in

an appropriately compassionate way. We might find a suitable way to inspire hope by pointing to the good in the situation, as in the example I'll present below. We might share guidance we receive. We might offer tangible help. We might offer words of comfort and condolence. Or we might simply listen in loving silence as our suffering brothers or sisters share their burdens with us. Whatever the form, though, I think our spirit of celebration expresses itself to those who suffer by somehow communicating the message, "I'm sorry you are suffering and I'm here to help. But I am not in despair. I know God loves you and ultimately everything will be all right. That is something to celebrate."

### *An example of the spirit of celebration applied to a situation of suffering*

This is an especially good example because it is about a group of people who are essentially the modern equivalent of Jesus' original peasant audience: poor migrants. My fiancée Patricia Zamudio (who currently lives in Mexico) has been working to help Latin American migrants for many years. She has been striving more and more to apply a Course-based perspective to this work, and she had a wonderful opportunity to do so a few months ago.

She was at a meeting of people from organizations who work with "migrants in transit" (those who cross Mexican territory in their journey from Central or South America to the United States), and she heard a lot of horror stories. The situation with migrants is getting worse and worse. These marginalized people are oppressed by everyone, especially the drug lords who have become much more powerful in recent years in parts of Mexico. The migrants are literally beaten, raped, and killed by people bent on taking advantage of them. Those who try to help them are daily putting themselves in grave danger. One after another, Patricia heard sad and harrowing stories. These people at the meeting, who have been working tirelessly to help migrants for years, were feeling hopeless and burnt out. The air was heavy with darkness.

Patricia was the final speaker, and as she was listening to the others, she was pondering what to say. How could she, as a Course student trying to bring the spirit of the Course into her work, communicate a message that reflected her trust in God in a compassionate way? What could she say that would overcome the darkness that hung thick in the room?

Right before she spoke, one of her colleagues said to her, "Please, say something hopeful." So, when her turn came, she decided to offer a message of hope. She spoke of all the good things being done for migrants in her area, all the people doing good work, all the progress being made toward a more collaborative effort among the groups that help migrants. She was, in essence, celebrating the good that was being done—not as a brief respite in the otherwise hopeless situation of the migrants, but as a reflection of the fact that God is Love, and He is working in so many people to bring about ultimate success in all they were doing. It might take a while, but they shall overcome, with God's Help.

Clearly, the message of hope and celebration got through, for when she concluded, everyone applauded! She told me later that the entire atmosphere had changed from one of despair to one of hope. Her decision to celebrate the divinely inspired good that was happening transformed the entire situation from sadness to joy, from fear to love, from lament to celebration. This is something I think we can all do, every day, as we work with those who suffer.

## **Conclusion**

As more and more of us capture this spirit of celebration, we will join the joyous chorus singing the earthly song that reflects the song of Heaven. We will celebrate with Jesus the end of suffering and the remembrance of who we are as God created us. "And as each one elects to join with me, the song of thanks from earth to Heaven grows from tiny scattered threads of melody to one inclusive chorus from a world redeemed from hell, and giving thanks to You" (T-31. VIII.11:5).

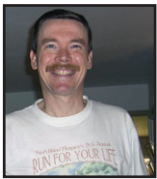
But we don't have to wait. Today is the day to celebrate, for "I can be free of suffering today" (W-pII.340.Heading). Today, like every day, is the day we can celebrate the glorious truth that our suffering has *already* ended, that we are right this moment safe in our Father's Heavenly embrace, and that we can realize this liberating truth this very day:

*Father, I thank You for today, and for the freedom I am certain it will bring. This day is holy, for today Your Son will be redeemed. His suffering is done. For he will hear Your Voice directing him to find Christ's vision through forgiveness, and be free forever from all suffering. Thanks for today, my Father. I was born into this world but to achieve this day, and what it holds in joy and freedom for Your holy Son and for the world he made, which is released along with him today.*

Be glad today! Be glad! There is no room for anything but joy and thanks today. Our Father has redeemed His Son this day. Not one of us but will be saved today. Not one who will remain in fear, and none the Father will not gather to Himself, awake in Heaven in the Heart of Love. (W-pII.340.1:1-6)



Let the celebration begin! Let it begin today!



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

Thank you!

Our gratitude goes out to Circle Course Community member Ellen Frisch, who sent us the following kind words of appreciation for the Circle's work. A Course student for two years, Ellen lives in Charleston, South Carolina with her husband of 36 years, and is employed at the Medical University of South Carolina. She has three children and three grandchildren, and is passionate about and active in English bull terrier rescue efforts.

*"It has been two years this week since I first found the letters ACIM in a list of book references and "googled" it. I bought the FIP version from Amazon and started reading it. I will never forget my first reaction of, "This is it, this is home." As I started reading it—the preface, the table of contents, the introduction—I was blown away, I was excited. Reading the "How it Came" section slightly set off my "woowoo" meter. (This is my internal alarm that is triggered by what I affectionately call "new age BS.")*

*However, as I started in on Chapter 1, my balloon of excitement burst. I did not get it. I kept reading, but it was difficult for me to understand. Four months later, I discovered the Circle of Atonement website. It contained a wealth of information and included teaching that was provided in all sorts of formats, which I think is key to learning and understanding the Course. And it was not until I listened to all of the segments of Robert's Circle Course Community class on the Miracle Principles that I understood what a miracle was!*

*What Robert and the Circle of Atonement community and website structure are doing is right on target in providing a way to accelerate learning and understanding. I truly do not believe I would be at this point in my understanding after two years of study without it."*

Please visit our online bookstore at [www.circlepublishing.org](http://www.circlepublishing.org) to learn more about our educational resources such as the Circle Course Community telephone classes Ellen mentions here, or to make a tax-deductible donation in support of our work. Thank you!

*The following are reader responses to Greg's article in A Better Way #111, "Individual Responsibility or Communal Responsibility: What Would the Course Have Us Emphasize?"*

Wow Greg! Your recent article perfectly articulated the issues of individuality versus community I have grappled with, especially since beginning to study the Course ten years ago. I own and run a business and feel assaulted by over-regulation and interference and truly want to be left alone to run my business, hence a libertarian stance. But I also observe my impact on employees, vendors, customers, and community and have committed to loving standards of behavior toward those groups and a conscious capitalism philosophy. I love it that a Course teacher has put this into words so perfectly. At times, I have felt that Course communities I have explored have been heavily leaning toward — "businesses are bad, rich people are to be suspected, the system is to be blamed" — and have struggled to find a place in them. Thank you for carving out an attitudinal space that fits like a glove.

— Peggy Knoll

Enjoyed your article. If we can love, forgive, look inward for answers, we can do it.

Two recent sayings I came across:

1. Take one day at a time. Do the best you can. Turn it all over to God. “God here I am!” *And...*

2. God is singing to you through the birds. Everything is Divinity. Nothing else exists. God speaks to you all the time — you have to learn how to listen.

I keep saying to myself, I’m in heaven according to how I look at this...situation, nature, dung, etc. I see everything in the light. Everything has in it the light of God. We are truly blessed if we learn how to listen and how to see.

— Dorothy Gayhart-Kunz

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I found this article to be over-intellectualized and very dualistic. In practice our faithful attention to the Workbook and its practices would lead naturally to a change of mind about everything. To the extent that we ourselves have changed our minds, to that extent the Course’s teaching would come through us in a very natural way and this supposed dilemma would be nonexistent.

— Mary Benton

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Your insights on the perspective of individual/communal responsibilities are most helpful. The article feels well thought out. You have a gift for expressing your views with loving rationality and Course understanding.

It gives me pause to reflect on having seen Tom Shadyac’s documentary *I Am*, then walking out of the theater and right past the outstretched hand of a street person. How could I do that? There is a gnawing guilt thought that continues to linger. Why couldn’t I have at the very least paused to offer her an uplifting comment that would have brought joining? I am bewildered at this act of separation on my part.

There is much to learn and still much to forgive.

— Diane Butler

