



Miracles Depend on Timing Trusting in the Process of Positive Change

by Greg Mackie

I'm in the midst of preparing a talk on "How to Work Miracles," to be presented this April at the Community Miracles Center Conference in Las Vegas. In a nutshell, my talk is about how to become the living, breathing miracle workers *A Course in Miracles* wants us to become: ministers of God who hold our minds in a miracle-minded state so that we are always ready to perform miracles for others, as guided by Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

I've been trying to follow Jesus' instructions for how to work miracles (especially the instructions in the early dictation of the Course), and while I'm not raising the dead just yet, this endeavor has been very fruitful. And in the course of my preparations, one idea has jumped out at me in a way that it never has before: the idea that, to quote a miracle principle from Helen's shorthand notebooks, "Miracles depend on timing." This idea, which underscores the importance of trust in the process of positive change that miracles are meant to bring about, has had a powerful positive impact on me. In this article, I'd like to share a little of what I've learned about this.

The timing of miracles: a three-way readiness

As I mentioned, there is a miracle principle in Helen's shorthand notebooks that says "Miracles depend on timing." The specific discussion that accompanies this principle is about letting Jesus take care of life's minutia so that the miracle worker (Helen in this case) can devote her time to miracles. But elsewhere, Jesus speaks of *readiness*, which is how we usually think of "timing," is it not? To say that the timing of something is good means that it's happening at just the right moment, the moment when everyone and everything involved is ready for it.

The "readiness" passage that has struck me most is about Helen's "list," a group of people to whom Helen is meant to symbolically give back their "chalice," to remind them of their never-lost innocence—a type of miracle. Helen asks whether a particular person in her life is currently on her chalice list, and Jesus answers this way:

Whether he is or not depends on a three-way readiness. I am *always* ready. Your job is to take care of *your* readiness. His readiness is up to him.

This suggests that miracles—I'm speaking here of what Jesus calls "miracle-doing," the extension of miracles to others—depend on this three-way readiness. In other words, when all three parties are ready, all systems are go and the timing is right to extend a miracle. (I would add here a reassuring corollary to this idea that is emphasized throughout the Course: This "all systems are go" readiness *will* come about eventually if we are truly meant to give a particular person a miracle—it is guaranteed.) This is the idea that has captured me, and this is what I'll be expanding upon in the rest of this article.

A major problem: lack of trust in the timing of that readiness

All of us yearn to perform miracles. We may not use the phrase "perform miracles" to describe this, but we all yearn to be truly helpful to other people, which is what performing miracles is all about. When it comes to actually fulfilling our role as miracle workers, however, we often find it a challenge. Why is this?

There are many reasons, of course, reasons that are covered thoroughly in the pages of the Course. But here, I want to focus on that three-way readiness idea. As I think about my own experience and that of others, it seems to me that a big problem behind many of our difficulties is a lack of trust in the timing of the various kinds of readiness that are needed for the miracle to happen.

It seems to me as well that this lack of trust in that timing often leads to two unfortunate emotional responses: We can sink into *despair* because it seems that the miracle we yearn to bring about will never happen, and/or we can be driven to *impatience* that leads us to try to force a miracle to happen before its time. The "and/or" in that last sentence was care-

fully chosen, for indeed I think the two responses often go together: Our despair that the miracle won't happen in a million years often leads directly to the impatient attempt to *make* it happen *right now*.

This lack of trust can arise in regard to any and all of the three types of readiness mentioned in that passage above. So, I'll speak a bit more about what it can look like for each type.

Lack of trust in the timing of Jesus' readiness

Jesus says "I am *always* ready," but how often do we really act as if that's actually true? Sure, in theory we may believe that he really meant it when he said "I am with you always," as both the Bible and the Course affirm. But when we're facing a particular situation where we need his help right now, perhaps one of those situations that the Course tells us we will "recognize" as a situation calling for a miracle (see W-p1.77.7:5), it so often seems to us that he is out to lunch. This lack of trust that Jesus is really there for us can lead to a despair that his absence makes miracles a futile undertaking, and/or an impatience that leads us to try to "go it alone," to try to manufacture a miracle without him.

Lack of trust in the timing of our own readiness

Jesus says "Your job is to take care of *your* readiness," which means that unlike the other two types of readiness, the timing of our readiness is to a certain degree in our own hands. Yet how often do we really act as if our attempts to bring about our readiness through our Course study and practice will really *succeed* in readying us to perform miracles? So often, we lack trust that we have what it takes to do the job, and so it seems to us that we'll *never* be ready. Why can't I heal the sick and raise the dead—or even make my baby daughter's cold go away—like the Course promises? This can lead to a despair that we will never really be able to perform miracles, and/or an impatience that leads us to attempt miracles before we are really ready.

Lack of trust in the timing of the miracle receiver's readiness

Jesus says the miracle receiver's readiness "is up to him," but how often do we really act as if the person to whom we are meant to give *will* be ready in his own time and in his own way? Let's face it, we often don't believe in the people to whom we attempt to offer miracles, and are quick to judge them when they don't respond to our attempts at kindness as *we* want them to respond. This can lead to a despair that the person we're trying to help is a hopeless case who will never benefit from our miracles, and/or an impatience that leads us to push a miracle on someone—"ready or not, here I come!"—before the timing is really right.

The solution to this problem: trust in the timing of that readiness

If the problem is not trusting in the timing of that three-way readiness, the obvious solution is to strengthen our trust in the timing of that readiness. I don't mean to be glib about this; such trust can be very challenging, especially when we're dealing with the suffering of people we love. Developing this is a gradual process, of course, a process of growing in trust as we continue along the Course's path. That being said, here I'll speak a bit more about what this trust can look like for each of the three types of readiness that Jesus mentions.

Trust in the timing of Jesus' readiness

Since Jesus is "always ready," trust in the timing of his readiness simply means trusting that he *is* always ready. Indeed, trust that Jesus is *always* ready, willing, and able to help us is a huge theme in the Course. A perfect example of this is a Course passage to which I've already alluded, which assures us that Jesus really is with us all the time—yes, even in *that* situation we're thinking of right now, the one needing a miracle that we ourselves may be called to give:

When I said "I am with you always," I meant it literally. I am not absent to anyone in any situation. Because I am always with you, *you* are the way, the truth and the life. (T-7.III.1 7:7-9)

His constant presence ensures that *we* are the way, the truth, and the life, bringers of miracles to all who are sent to us. For this reason, Jesus encourages us as miracle workers to "maintain a consistent trust" (T-2.V.4:2) in his readiness to send miracles through us whenever the timing is right. He has promised to do so, and as he once said to Helen about his many promises, "I never make them lightly, because I know the need my brothers have for trust" (*Absence from Felicity*, pp. 279-280).

What a beautiful assurance! To the degree that we really trust in him, we can have confidence that he will send a miracle through us right when it is needed, and we can let go of our impatient impulse to go it alone.

Trust in the timing of our own readiness

Since it is our job to take care of our own readiness, trust in the timing here obviously doesn't mean just sitting on the couch and waiting for a bolt of miracle lightning to hit us. Rather, I think here we need to trust in our inherent ability to work miracles, and to trust in the means that have been provided—our Course study and practice, and the help Jesus and the Holy Spirit offer—to ready us to work miracles. Along these lines, I love this passage from the Urtext:

The power to work Miracles belongs to you. I will create the right opportunities for you to do them. But you must be ready & willing to do them, since you are already able to. Doing them will bring conviction in the ability. I repeat that you will see Miracles thru your hands thru *mine*.

Here, Jesus affirms our ability to work miracles, stresses the importance of our readying ourselves to do them (which implies that the means he's offering us to ready ourselves *will* work), and assures us that he's there to help us, so success is guaranteed. We simply need to be willing to cultivate our readiness to do miracles—to “hold yourself ready,” as the Urtext says elsewhere—and Jesus will take care of the rest when the time is right. We will see his miracles come through us to others, and this will convince us that whenever we're ready and willing, we are truly able to work miracles.

How wonderful! We may not be able to raise the dead today, or even make our baby daughter's cold go away this instant, but we *can* do whatever miracles Jesus wants us to do *now*, and any he wants us to do in the future. (This point is buttressed by the fact that, as personal guidance to Helen and Bill makes clear, even very simple acts of kindness like visiting your mother-in-law can be miracles. We don't have to do “spectacular” things.) To the degree that we can trust our innate miracle-working ability and the means that make us ready to use that ability, we can have confidence that we *will* extend miracles when they are needed, and we can let go of the impatience that can lead us to desperately attempt miracles before our readiness is ripe.

Trust in the timing of the miracle receiver's readiness

Since the miracle receiver's readiness is up to him, I think what we need to trust here is that the receiver is *capable* of receiving what we offer him, and that if Jesus wants us to work a miracle for him, he *will* receive it—even if it looks to us like he doesn't. With people for whom we are not guided to perform a miracle, this means trusting that they'll be ready eventually if one is needed, and they'll be okay in the meantime. With people for whom we *are* guided to perform a miracle but the miracle doesn't seem to “work,” this means trusting that a truly given miracle *is* received and will bring about positive effects when the receiver is fully ready to accept it (see M-6.1-2).

I want to spend a little more time here on the receiver's readiness, because this is a topic that doesn't get very much attention. The Course, especially in the early dictation, is clear that one of the reasons Jesus does *not* guide us to do a miracle for someone is that the person isn't ready at that time. And if we bullheadedly decide to overrule Jesus and try to force a miracle onto the situation, the results are disastrous. For the receiver, the miracle will not be effective and can even throw him into a panic (see T-2.IV.4:9). For the giver, indulging “indiscriminate miracle impulses” can lead to strain and eventual burnout. In the early dictation of the Course, Jesus claims that this is exactly what happened to the psychic healer Edgar Cayce.

This is why Jesus says in his comments about Cayce, “The answer is *never* perform a miracle without asking me *if* you should. This spares you from exhaustion” (Urtext). As I think about this, I'm struck by how the three-way readiness idea sheds light on the specific reason we need to ask Jesus: We need to ask him because only he (or the Holy Spirit) knows when *everyone* is ready, and therefore when a miracle will be truly effective and healing for everyone involved.

As with Jesus' antidotes to the first two forms of lack of trust, I find this profoundly beautiful and inspiring. To the degree that we can trust our brother's innate ability to heal and Jesus' impeccable sense of timing, we will see the situation in a whole new way: We can be confident that the person to whom we offer a miracle will “get it” when the time is right, and we can let go of our impatient zeal to *make* him get it on our timetable.

Positive impacts of this “trust in the timing” idea for me

As I've said, this whole idea that miracles depend on timing has had a powerful positive impact on me. For one thing, this idea, with its implicit call for confidence and patience, has given me a new appreciation for the Course's description of patience as an attribute of the advanced teacher of God:

Those who are certain of the outcome can afford to wait, and wait without anxiety. Patience is natural to the teacher of God. All he sees is certain outcome, at a time perhaps unknown to him as yet, but not in

doubt...Patience is natural to those who trust. Sure of the ultimate interpretation of all things in time, no outcome already seen or yet to come can cause them fear. (M-4.VIII.1:1-4, 9-10)

I've always loved this passage and have often used it as a practice to respond to my own impatience. But this material about the timing of miracles is helping me to see it with new eyes. In the past, I've seen this passage more in terms of the macro level: Be patient, because in the long run, everything will work out. That theme is indeed loud and clear in this passage, but now I'm also seeing a specific application to my miracle working: Be patient, because you will be told when everyone involved is ready for you to extend a miracle, and the positive results of all of your miracles will reveal themselves in the fullness of time. This gives me a tremendous sense of assurance.

And I can really use that assurance. Like many people, I want to be truly helpful to others, but it often seems very hard to do. There's so much suffering and so much work to be done that at times it can feel overwhelming. At times, like many people, I feel powerless in the face of forces that are so much bigger than me. All of this can lead to a distressing sense of confusion and inner conflict: part of me wants to go to war and fix everything at once, and part of me just wants to raise the white flag and surrender.

For me, this "timing" idea applied to miracle working helps to undo these distressing feelings. When they come up, I simply need to remind myself again and again that I am *not* powerless: "The power to work Miracles belongs to [me]." All I need do is be ready and willing to do them, because I am already able. If I can simply trust in the tools I have to ready myself for miracles and trust in my deep-down willingness to do them, I can also trust that the ever-ready Jesus will "create the right opportunities for [me] to do them." I will see Jesus sending miracles through me, and "Doing them will bring conviction in the ability." And if I can also trust the people to whom I offer miracles, I can be patient with them as the results unfold in their own time.

And moving again to the macro level: Because *everyone* has the power to do miracles and I can trust the timing of the process of their unfolding, I really can rest assured that in the long run, everything will work out. This is crucial, I think, for those of us who are devoted to bringing about positive change in the world. My partner Patricia and I work with activists, and many of them are filled with despair at the slowness of the process, which often leads to impatient attempts to force things to move faster. For some, the strain of this is ultimately unbearable: After years of fighting what seems to them a losing battle, they get burned out and sometimes even give up. What a blessing it would be for them to learn how to trust in the timing of the process! It would enable these miracle workers—and all of us—to be more effective as despair and impatience are replaced with confidence and trust.

Conclusion

It's such a simple idea, really, but so powerful: Miracles depend on timing. So, we need to trust in the timing of Jesus' readiness to send miracles through us, trust in the timing of our readiness to send miracles from him to our brothers, and trust in the timing of our brothers' readiness to receive those miracles and benefit from them. And we need to trust that this process is at work with everyone, everywhere in the world. Filled with this trust, we can set aside whatever anxiety we may have about the situations that confront us, and breathe a blessed sigh of relief.

However bad things seem to be, all is truly well, for as Shakespeare famously said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men." This is true, I think, for everything from the tiny details of our personal lives to the grand events of history. It is true for everything from helping our alcoholic friend to opening a migrant shelter to ending apartheid in South Africa. So, I am learning to trust in the process of positive change. The idea that miracles depend on the timing of our readiness—a readiness that is ultimately *guaranteed*—gives me the confidence and patience I need to joyfully roll up my sleeves and get to work. I hope it will do the same for you.



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CIRCLE MAILBOX

The following are reader responses to Robert's article in A Better Way #136, "The Sole Responsibility of the Miracle Worker': What Does That Line Really Mean?"

I have just read your exploration of the meaning of "The sole responsibility..." and I wanted to say "Awesome!" and "thank you"—it was very clear and informative and helped clear up a line that I have often puzzled over.

— Mark Mifsud

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Thanks ever so much for "walking us through," as you say (love that expression!), to an understanding of what it is to be a miracle worker. This will be very helpful to many. In our group there are a couple of women who keep asking, though, for more clarifications of the word "Atonement." This is especially necessary for people brought up in a Jewish environment and who never heard the word before studying the Course. Could I ask you to expand on the word "Atonement" in a future article, please? Thank you.

— Joan Bachmann

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Thank you, Robert, for your brilliantly clarifying article. Immensely helpful.
Jesus has said that this is a simple Course. I believe that, but I also believe that we need to help each other to understand it fully. And isn't that right in line with the constantly repeated idea that we don't get to Heaven alone?
Thanks so much. I have been helped tremendously by you, Allen Watson, Ken Wapnick, and others.

— Terry Petty

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Thanks for clarifying a difficult passage. Once again you have cut right to the heart of the question. I am in agreement with you. I believe that our job is to see love and be love and that is it. Your understanding of the above statement's meaning is in line with my beliefs and I thank you for it!

— Jamie McAllaster

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Much appreciation for your thorough exploration of the thought "The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself" (T-2.V.5:1).

To answer your last question: "How could we have gotten it so wrong?"

You already gave the answer: The edited version of the FIP edition left out a very important reference sentence. Whether that was intentional or an oversight on the editor's part, thank you for restating it in your article, and for the clarification that followed.

Whenever Jesus says "I have already said," it's a good idea to go back and look up that earlier statement. In this case, it unfortunately got edited out of the FIP version of the Course, so it can't be found there. The earlier statement is this: "The distinction has also been made here between 'miracle-mindedness' as a *state*, and 'miracle-doing' as its expression."

Also, the reminder "You are perfectly safe as long as you are completely unconcerned about your readiness, but maintain a consistent trust in mine" (4:2) takes the load off my "responsibility" for others and places my trust on Christ's strength. For me, just remembering to step back and let Him lead the way brings the Atonement into my awareness.

— Rev. Judy Junghans