



“You Need to Learn How to Love Other People”

A Story of Guidance

by Greg Mackie

Recently, I had a frustrating week that turned out to be a rewarding week, and I hope even a transformative week. The centerpiece of it was powerful guidance that I received quite unexpectedly, guidance that I had the opportunity to put to the test a few days after receiving it.

I want to share what happened, in the hope that others will find my story helpful to them on their own journey with *A Course in Miracles*. The Course, especially in the early dictation, places such an emphasis on replacing *lack* of love with *expressions* of love—miracles—in our interactions with other people. At its heart, that is what this story is about. My lesson in everything that happened here was all about learning how to love people, and what more vital and wonderful thing could we learn than that?

The situation: my anger at other people for all the problems they were causing me

It all started when I went to Mexico City to get a new passport to replace the one I had lost. That went fine, but everything went downhill from there. I was staying in a small Mexico City apartment with Patricia and her daughter, along with Patricia’s sister and her partner. I wanted to get some pressing work done on my computer, but at every turn I was—to put it diplomatically—thwarted by one person or another not conforming to my standards of proper behavior (the common denominator: *noise, noise, noise!*). I decided therefore to take the first bus back to our big, blessedly quiet house five hours away in Xalapa. (Patricia would remain behind the rest of the week to do some work.) Finally, I would get some work done!

Unfortunately, it wasn’t to be. It turned out that I had left my computer’s power adapter in Mexico City, and the computer’s power had been drained dry on my bus trip home. So, there was no way for me to do any work at all, and though I made every attempt to rectify the situation—trying my other adapters, looking to buy a new one, seeking out cyber cafes, etc.—nothing, and I mean nothing, worked. Like it or not, I was going to be in limbo for the next four or five days.

And I hate to admit it, but I was very angry. The anger had begun with all those noisy people interrupting my work, and had worked its way to a full boil once I realized that this series of unfortunate events had brought my work to a complete halt. In my mind, it seemed that the whole world was conspiring to make me miserable. Of course, as a teacher of *A Course in Miracles* I knew that couldn’t be the case, but it sure *felt* that way. I needed, in those famous words, a “better way” to deal with this problem.

The guidance: the *only* cause of my problems is my lack of love for other people

Fortunately, even in my anger, I had enough sanity to consider at least a better way of seeing my current predicament regarding work: the world was not conspiring against me, but maybe the Holy Spirit was conspiring *for* me. My enforced time off looked suspiciously like a divine setup. After all, I hadn’t had a spiritual retreat in several years, and it looked like everything had fallen into place to have one now. So, I decided to make the best of my situation and spend the week in prayer, meditation, and quiet reading.

In my very first session of prayer and meditation, then, I decided to face my problem head on. I started talking to Jesus. I told him that I felt angry and frustrated with other people and situations in my life. I told him that it sometimes felt as if the whole world was conspiring against me, keeping me from doing what I really wanted to do, frustrating me no end. I asked him if he had anything to say to me about this situation.

In retrospect, I think that when I asked him for guidance, Jesus said “Finally!” It seems like he took full advantage of the small opening I gave him, because I immediately got what felt like real guidance from him. Of course one can never be one hundred percent certain about such things, but the thoughts that came to me felt like they came from a much higher place than the usual hamster wheel of my mind. They seemed to drop in out of nowhere, with a power that spoke

of a love, wisdom, and conviction far grander than my own little mind and its petty concerns.

What was the guidance? It was very simple, really, and powerful for its very simplicity. It was this: “*All* of your problems, Greg, come from *your* lack of love—your hatred, your anger, your judgment, your perfectionism. You need to learn how to love other people. *This* is the solution to *all* of your problems.” The tone of it was loving but also very firm. Jesus’ love for me was clear, but there was also a sense of urgency. The sense of it was that I *must* deal with this problem, because he has work for me to do in the celestial speedup, work that is needed to respond to the “acute emergency” we are facing, and I cannot do this work as long as I’m so embittered and loveless. There was a real sense that I need to shape up and stop wasting my time in pettiness.

It felt like real guidance, as I’ve said. And as if Jesus wanted to make sure I got the message, a short time later I got a “sign” of the type Robert has written about (a form of guidance involving parallel events that together present a common message). The first event of this sign was my reception of Jesus’ guidance in my meditation. The second event was, of all things, a description of an old Elvis Presley movie that I came upon in a book a few minutes later. In the movie, Elvis plays a doctor who is working with a nun at a home for underprivileged children. There’s one child there who is so angry that she literally won’t speak a word—a child so withdrawn from the world that both Elvis and the nun regard her problem as “autistic frustration.” Well, Dr. Elvis has the answer: He gives her a big hug, tells her how much he loves her, and gives her a remedy that hit me between the eyes as I was reading: “You’ve got to start learning how to love people.” Instantly, she is cured. Okay, Jesus—I got the message.

I received this guidance with joy, because I knew he was right. It made so much sense to me, especially because it’s exactly what the Course teaches. I was thinking, “I really do need to learn how to love other people. I’m tired of being this way, so full of anger and judgment—it feels miserable. And I really want to fulfill the function that Jesus has for me. I want to love in a loveless place, as the Course says.” So, I made a firm commitment to really live the new, more loving life he was holding out to me. I didn’t want to let this guidance get lost in the shuffle when the demands of my life returned in a few days. I wanted to really learn how to love other people, and so I started devising ways—Course-like practices and such—to really make this guidance a permanent part of me.

The test: an opportunity to replace anger with love for other people (and dogs!)

Of course, one thing I did was apply this new, more loving perspective to the situation that led up to my enforced retreat—the coffee klatsch, the housekeeper, the forgotten adapter, etc.—and that was extremely helpful. I also worked on extending real love to the people I met on the street when I went out over the next few days. But later in the week, one particular incident happened that was so strange that it almost seemed as if it dropped in from Heaven—quite literally, as you’ll see.

First, a little background: An ongoing source of annoyance for Patricia and me has been our neighbor’s dogs. In Mexico many of the roofs of houses are flat, and people use the space on the roof for many things, including a space for their dogs. Our neighbor keeps her dogs on her roof, and unfortunately, they are a constant source of aggravation: they bark incessantly, they often get onto our roof (the houses are closely connected), and they constantly leave the standard canine calling cards—so rarely cleaned up that the wind carries the awful smell to our house. The neighbor is a nice woman and we’ve talked to her many times about this, but to no avail.

Now to the incident: It was night, it was raining hard, and I was headed toward our kitchen to make dinner. As I walked, I glanced out the sliding glass door to our small, fully enclosed patio. And to my amazement, literally right at that instant, a dog dropped straight down out of the sky onto the concrete patio. I’ve heard of “raining cats and dogs,” but this was ridiculous. Of course, it was one of our neighbor’s dogs, Droopy, who had somehow fallen off the roof two stories up and landed right in front of me. I ran over to the patio, slid open the door, and saw that, amazingly, he didn’t appear to be hurt at all—thank goodness. I couldn’t resist: I said to him, “Hi, Droopy. So nice of you to drop in.”

Alas, there was a problem: We have metal bars on the patio door, bars that only slide open when you unlock them with a key. Droopy was too wide to pull through them, and I couldn’t find the key. I called Patricia, but she was out of cell phone range. So there we were: Droopy was whimpering because he was stuck on the patio. I could reach through the bars and touch him, but I couldn’t rescue him. Meanwhile, the neighbor was outside looking for him and calling for him, with obvious concern in her voice. So, I stuck my head out the back door and told her that he had fallen onto our patio, that he looked okay, but that I needed to find our key to get him out.

And unfortunately, once more I have to admit that I was angry. Once I saw that Droopy was okay, the resentful thoughts started streaming through my head: “Here I was going to have a relaxing dinner, and now I’m stuck with yet another problem with her dang dogs. This only happened because they got onto our roof again: He fell off of *our* roof and is now stuck on *our* patio. And I can’t find the dang key anywhere. How long am I going to be stuck with this whimpering dog on my patio? There goes the evening. What’s wrong with people? Why don’t they *think*? Why can’t this woman be more responsible?”

But then it hit me: This was *exactly* what Jesus said is my one and only problem: my lack of love for others. This was the very thing that he emphatically told me I simply *have* to overcome. I need to learn how to love other people—and, apparently, dogs too. It felt almost like a test. I thought that guidance was so great at the time I got it, but was I actually going to follow it when the chips were down? Now was my chance. I told myself, “Droopy needs my help, my neighbor needs my help—am I going to stew in anger, or am I going to be loving to these children of God who need me?” I dearly wanted to do the latter. So, I made a firm commitment to that goal, took a few deep breaths, and asked Jesus what to do.

And amazingly, everything fell right into place from that moment forward. I got the idea to call our once-a-week housekeeper and ask her where the key might be. She answered the phone and told me immediately—as it turns out, I already *had* found the key, but I must not have inserted it properly the first time I tried it. Maybe keys don’t work when you’re angry. At any rate, now it worked perfectly, and within seconds I had unlocked the bars and pulled Droopy into the house. I immediately took him to the front door, opened it up, and my neighbor was right there waiting for him.

What happened next was truly beautiful: I put Droopy down, my neighbor wrapped her arms around him, and then thanked me profusely and gave me a huge hug. She was *so* grateful! She had been very concerned, and I could tell what a huge relief it was for her that her *perrito* was safe. I was glad too. I really loved her in that moment and she loved me. It felt like a holy encounter, like I had extended a miracle and she had gratefully received it. Lack of love was replaced by love. I had passed the test, at least for the moment.

Patricia and I discovered an unexpected postscript to this story on the day I began writing this piece. It turns out that our neighbor’s ex-husband, who owns her house, is kicking her out of it, so she is going to have to leave. She’s giving away the dogs. As much trouble as we’ve had with the dogs, this is in no way good news for Patricia and me; she really is a nice woman and we’re sorry this has happened. Now, I’m all the more glad that, during a time when unbeknownst to me she was struggling with this huge issue in her life, I gave her love and helpfulness rather than anger over her supposedly not meeting my petty needs. Patricia and I will be praying for her and offering her assistance as she goes through this big change in her life.

The future: I need to keep learning how to love other people

Well, that’s my story. I can still feel the impact of that guidance and what happened afterward. I’m convinced that there is something deeply true about the counsel I received. I know that I need to keep learning how to love other people. I really do want to respond to the “acute emergency” Jesus says we’re facing. I really do want to fulfill my function in his plan to undo lack of love with expressions of love. Something deep inside tells me that this is the way home for me.

I’m hoping that this story is helpful for you as well, because it seems to me that everyone struggles with problems similar to mine. We spend so much time blaming others, being angry at others, and condemning others for all the ways they seem to make our lives miserable. Surely, we tell ourselves, if only they would get their act together, we could be happy.

But no: As the Course so eloquently tells us, *all* of our pain comes *only* from our own lack of love, our own lovelessness toward others. In this crazy world where hate and anger and blame seem to be poisoning everything (Exhibit A: the 2016 election), what message could be more desperately needed than this call to love one another? I pray that we all will keep learning, day by day, how to love other people.



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