



A BETTER WAY

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The Rules That Promise You a Happy Day

My Practice of the Rules for Decision

by Greg Mackie

“Rules for Decision” (T-30.I) is a simply amazing section of the Text. It lays out in a systematic way rules designed to place all of our decisions into the hands of the Holy Spirit. For the past month or so, I’ve been trying to follow these rules as the section lays them out. While I certainly cannot claim to hear the Holy Spirit clearly all the time, the

attempt to let Him govern my life through these rules has brought real benefits that have changed my life for the better. In this article, I’d like to briefly describe the rules for decision and share my experience of practicing them.

Why follow the rules for decision?

Jesus assumes that we have been reading the Text up to the point where the rules for decision are introduced. After reading twenty-nine chapters, the goal of the Course should be clear to us. That goal goes by many names, but for this article, I’ll simply call it “salvation.” Now, in the first paragraph of chapter 30, we are told: “The goal is clear, but now you need specific methods for attaining it” (T-30.In.1:2). We’ve seen some of those methods earlier in the Text, “but they are more ideas than rules of thought to you as yet” (1:6).

This is why we need the rules for decision. To speed us to the goal of salvation, these rules must become “the rules by which you live” (1:7), “habits” of thought (1:8) that will enable us to journey speedily to our destination. Indeed, “The speed by which it can be reached depends on this one thing alone; your willingness to practice every step” (1:3).

Though the overall goal of the Course is salvation, the immediate goal of the rules for decision is more short-term: a *happy day*, a day joyously devoted to that goal of salvation. We tend to think that yoking our minds to the Holy Spirit is a sacrifice, but the section reminds us again and again that these are actually “the rules that promise you a happy day” (T-30.I.7:5; all subsequent references in this article will be to T-30.I unless otherwise noted). Following Him brings us happiness because what He wants for us is what we truly want. This has been my big incentive for practicing the rules. I know that achieving the long-term goal of the Course is something I really want deep down, but it feels kind of distant and abstract much of the time. However, I’m quite sure that I want a happy day right now, and Jesus tells me that “willingness to practice every step” is what offers that to me.

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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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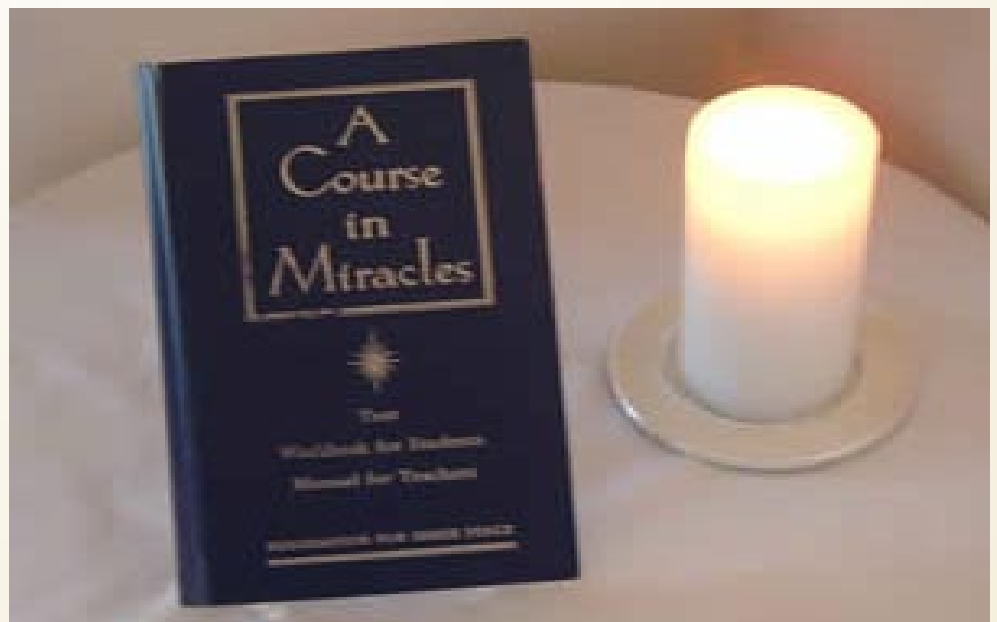
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Rule 1: Establish the proper mindset in the morning—the happy day you want comes from making no decisions by yourself

The “breakfast of champions” that will get our happy day off to a good start is morning quiet time devoted to establishing the proper mindset. The section’s counsel for doing this can be boiled down to three steps (note: when the section famously says, “*Do not fight yourself*” [1:7], these three steps are what you’re supposed to do instead of fighting yourself):

1. Think about the kind of day you want, a happy day devoted to the goal of salvation (1:8).
2. Tell yourself that you *can* have that happy day—it can be accomplished (1:8).
3. Place in your mind the means to that happy day: “*Today, I will make no decisions by myself*” (2:2). This means, of course, that instead of making decisions by myself today, I will make all of my decisions with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes on to say that this applies both to decisions about what to do *and* about how to perceive the situations in which you are called to do something. The perception aspect is crucial. Without it, you can easily get thrown off track as your mind goes through the following process (described in paragraph 3; thanks to Robert for this summary):

- You decide for yourself how to perceive a situation—you decide what it means.
- This defines what is wrong with the situation—the perceived *problem*.
- This defines what *question* should be asked to get an answer that will solve the problem.
- This defines the range of *answers* you will accept as valid solutions to the problem.
- The end result: The Holy Spirit’s answer will not look like a valid answer to your question, which will lead to you resisting His answer and therefore deciding for yourself what to do.

For instance, if you’ve decided that your roommate is viciously attacking you by not taking out the garbage as he agreed to—this is how you perceive the situation—you may decide that the problem is his not taking out the garbage, which leads you to ask the Holy Spirit, “How can I get that lazy bum to take out the garbage?” If the Holy Spirit then answers, “Forgive him and give him a big hug,” what will your reaction be? You’ll probably say, “You talkin’ to *me*? I don’t think You quite understand the situation here.” You’ll go forward with your own plan to get him to take out the garbage, and your happy day of making no decisions by yourself will be sunk.

My own process of working with those three steps of establishing the proper mindset in the morning goes something like this (though the details vary from day to day): I’ll think about my upcoming day, and imagine what it would be like if this were a happy day dedicated to the Course’s goal of salvation. I see myself doing the things I expect to be doing that day (like teaching a class or going to the post office) and also prepare my mind for anything unexpected that might come along. I imagine myself both perceiving the situations I encounter in a loving way and doing the kinds of things a truly loving and helpful person would do.

The idea here isn’t to program my day in detail, but simply to imagine what a happy day devoted to salvation *might* look like. This is what I think Jesus is asking us to do when he speaks of bringing to mind “the kind of day you want; the feelings you would have, the things you want to happen to you, and the things you would experience” (4:1). I’m not trying to engineer a day that would satisfy my ego; rather, I’m vividly imagining the sorts of things that would be part of a happy day of walking the Course’s path. This vivid imagining is really critical for me, because then I’m not just dutifully handing my day over to the Holy Spirit like a good Course soldier, but doing something that will make me *happy*.

This gives me the incentive I need to really *want* the concluding step. I conclude by committing myself to the first rule of decision. The words I use vary; I like to use words that convey the essence of the section’s instruction but are also personally meaningful to me. For instance: “This happy day can really happen if I make no decisions by myself. Holy Spirit, I place this day in your hands.”

One thing I’ve noticed about all the practices I’ll describe in this article: They may sound long and com-

plicated, but it doesn't take as long to actually do them as it does to describe them—especially once you've worked with them a while. This one I'm describing now only takes me a few minutes.

Rule 2: Remind yourself throughout the day that the happy day you want comes from making no decisions by yourself

The section says that “at any time you think of it and have a quiet moment for reflection” (4:1), you should bring to mind the happy day you committed to in the morning—again vividly imagining it—and say, *“If I make no decisions by myself, this is the day that will be given me”* (4:2). The idea is to remind yourself constantly that the happiness you want comes from making decisions with the Holy Spirit, not from following your own self-made plans. This is very much like the “frequent reminder” practices in the Workbook.

In addition to doing this practice anytime I think of it, I've also found it helpful to do it on the hour (like the hourly practices in the Workbook) and whenever I'm transitioning from one activity to another. I really need to remind myself of my goal frequently, or it will just get lost in the hustle and bustle of the day. Of course, these frequent reminders are ideal times to actually ask the Holy Spirit for help in the situations I'm currently facing.

The quick restorative: When a situation gets you off track, quickly remind yourself once again that the happy day you want comes from making no decisions by yourself

Ideally, we would just cruise through our day with the first two rules. But inevitably, problem situations will arise in which our minds go through that process I described above, and we're making decisions by ourselves—perhaps even actively refusing to ask the Holy Spirit for help. When this happens, Jesus tells us to apply this “quick restorative” (5:5):

1. Remember the happy day you want—the one you've been imagining all day (6:1).
2. Acknowledge that because of this situation, your day is no longer that happy day (6:1).
3. Acknowledge that the reason is that you've thrown away the means to that happy day: You've decided by yourself what the real question is, and thus have set by yourself a range of acceptable answers (6:2).
4. Say, *“I have no question. I forgot what to decide”* (6:4-5). This means: *“I don't know what needs solving about this situation. I forgot that I was deciding only with the Holy Spirit today.”*

I've found that certain kinds of situations are likely to get me off track. One category is situations in which I have a lot of emotional investment. Another is situations that require something of me that I really don't feel like doing. (Ironically, as I was writing this article, I learned about a major Circle shipment I needed to put together the next day—something I normally don't feel like doing. I had to apply the rules right then and there.) Another is challenging situations, like having that delicate conversation with someone who's upset with me. One more category, oddly enough, is situations in which I'm doing things I'm very good at. The reason these situations get me in trouble, I believe, is that when I'm good at something I tend to decide that I know what I'm doing. I'm more likely to ask for help when I *know* I don't have a clue.

The section speaks of actively refusing “to sit by and ask to have the answer given you” (5:3). I do dig in my heels like this sometimes, but my usual method of slipping into making decisions by myself is “forgetting” to ask. This happens both with specific problem situations and with the day in general if I don't do my frequent reminders. The momentum of my day gets going like a snowball rolling down a hill, and before I know it, several hours have gone by and I haven't asked the Holy Spirit for anything. This is a sneaky way refusing to ask; precisely because I know I almost certainly *will* ask if I stop that momentum for a moment, I resist stopping. The section says, “Your fear of being answered in a different way from what your version of the question asks will gain momentum, until you believe the day you want is one in which you get *your* answer to *your* question” (7:3). That's me.

When I've caught myself in this pattern, it's crucial that I "observe this rule without delay" (7:1). The first thing I need to do is *stop that snowball*—take a time out and get quiet. Then, I try to remember that happy day I want and be really honest with myself that "something has occurred that is not part of it" (6:1). Contrary to accepted Course lore, it's not all "perfect"; something has actually gone wrong here.

Once I really get that, I'm ready to apply the words of the quick restorative. Again, I'll often use words that convey the essence of the words given in the section, but which are personally meaningful to me: "Boy, it's been a while since I've asked for any guidance, and my day is going to pot. I forgot the goal I set this morning, but I'm going to get back on track now. Holy Spirit, I once again place the day in Your hands."

The longer restorative: When the quick restorative doesn't work, gently reason yourself back to the recognition that the happy day you want comes from making no decisions by yourself

If, after trying the quick restorative, we're still stuck in "my answer to my question" mode and unwilling to let the Holy Spirit decide for us, Jesus has a "Plan B" to get us back on track. This "Plan B" consists of gently talking ourselves out of the pit with this sequence (8:2, 9:2, 11:4, and 12:3-4):

*At least I can decide I do not like what I feel now.
And so I hope I have been wrong.
I want another way to look at this.
Perhaps there is another way to look at this.
What can I lose by asking?*

These lines basically mean the following:

*My refusal to ask the Holy Spirit for help in this situation has made me feel awful—the happy day I committed myself to this morning has gone to hell. If I'm right about this situation and my refusal to ask Him about it, then I'm stuck with these feelings. But if I'm wrong about all this, then the happy day I want may still be possible. Therefore, I hope I **have** been wrong, both about this situation and my decision to resist asking the Holy Spirit for guidance about it. I want another way to look at all of this. Perhaps there **is** another way. The other way is this: Since making decisions by myself has made me feel rotten, what can I lose by asking the Holy Spirit for help in this situation? Perhaps making no decisions by myself here really will give me the happy day I want.*

Think once again about that garbage example. You thought the question was how to get this lazy bum of a roommate to take out the garbage. The whole idea of forgiving him and giving him a big hug was simply ludicrous. But now you see that your resistance to the Holy Spirit's answer has brought you nothing but pain—obstinately insisting on *your* answer to *your* question has robbed you of the happiness that comes from making no decisions by yourself. Thus you really do hope your stance here is wrong, because if it is wrong, an alternative that could relieve your pain becomes possible. You say to yourself, "Perhaps making no decisions by myself will actually make me happy. What can I lose by asking the Holy Spirit for help?" As you offer your now open mind to the Holy Spirit, He gently reminds you of the only thing that will really make you happy here: forgiveness, the means of salvation. Now the Holy Spirit's answer makes perfect sense. Imagine how happy you'll feel when you and your roommate are at peace with one another. (And who knows? He may be so grateful that he'll take out the garbage!)

I find that I don't have to do the longer restorative very often—not because I'm any sort of spiritual giant, but because, as I said above, once I stop the snowball (the hard part), I can usually get back on track. But I do refuse to ask sometimes, and when I do, this longer restorative is a tremendous help.

The section describes the second step—"And so I hope I have been wrong"—as "the turning point" (10:1), and I've found this is really true. Again, the key is to avoid the "it's all perfect" thing and admit the possibility of actually being *wrong*. Like everyone else, I have a hard time admitting this. We're all a bit like Fonzie

in the old *Happy Days* TV series, who used to struggle to say, “I was wr-r-r-r-r...” The beauty of this longer restorative, though, is that it presents the possibility of being wrong not as bad news but as tremendously good news, something to be *hoped* for. My “Don’t confuse me with the facts” approach to this situation has just made me feel terrible. Admitting that I could be wrong and opening myself to the Holy Spirit’s counsel is actually the way to have the happy day I really want.

This admission leads to that last line: “*What can I lose by asking?*” I love this line. It’s important to realize that this line *is* the other way called for in the previous line, “*Perhaps there is another way to look at this.*” This other way says: “What can I lose by asking the Holy Spirit to decide for me in this situation, instead of deciding for myself? I’m not sure yet that His answer will really bring me happiness, but I *am* sure that my own answer has *not*. So, what the heck? Why not try on a new pair of glasses—what can it hurt? Perhaps the Holy Spirit really does have a better view of this situation than I do. Since my own pigheadedness has failed so miserably, might it perhaps be a good idea to ask a Being with all knowledge for guidance here? *Duh.*”

As I said earlier, these processes don’t take nearly as long to do as they take to describe. This longer restorative can really be gone through very quickly. And once again, I find it helpful to choose words that are personally meaningful to me. “Holy Spirit, I feel rotten. My resistance to You has caused me nothing but trouble, so I really hope deciding with You will make me happier. What can I lose by putting the day back into Your hands?”

The fruit of the rules: more happy days

Following these rules has seemed to enable me to hear the Holy Spirit’s Voice more clearly. Now, I’m certainly not claiming that I have a crystal clear channel to Him—far from it. However, I think the fact that I’m repeatedly *attempting* to hear Him has at least increased the odds of Him getting through. As the Course says, “If you have made it a habit to ask for help when and where you can, you can be confident that wisdom will be given you when you need it” (M-29.5:8). That does seem to be more and more the case for me since I started practicing the rules.

To conclude, I’d like to list some of the benefits I’ve experienced from this practice, benefits that suggest the Holy Spirit may actually be getting through to me more than He used to.

I have greater peace of mind

This is primarily the result of asking the Holy Spirit to guide my perception of the situations I encounter. This, as we’ve seen, is the basis for His guidance about what to do in those situations. We all know as Course students that we’re supposed to ask the Holy Spirit to shift our perception of everything. The rules for decision provide a structured framework that enables me to ask for that shift on a regular basis. It’s truly amazing what regular asking does to my state of mind. It really does lift me up. I really have experienced more peace, love, and joy in situations that in the past I would have found quite distressing. What a great feeling!

I find that things go more smoothly

Since I started this practice, it seems that my life has been flowing much more smoothly and easily than it was before. More and more, things just seem to unfold without a lot of stress and strain. It’s not that difficult and disruptive events don’t happen any more; for instance, I’ve recently had some unexpected car troubles that have cost me a lot of time and money. But even in that situation, help has been there when I needed it. I had Triple-A when my car needed towing, a car available to use while mine was in the shop, and savings to cover most of the repairs. The situation has certainly been a challenge, but things seem to be resolving themselves without much difficulty.

I more often get guidance that’s unexpected, that deviates from my schedule

I tend to be a schedule-oriented person. I like my day to be planned out, and tend to be resistant to deviating from the plan. Since I started the rules for decision, however, it seems that I’ve gotten guidance to change my plan more often than before. (Was I always getting that guidance but just not hearing it?) A

recent example was when a couple of friends unexpectedly asked me to help them move furniture and other items as they were relocating to a new state. I had a lot of Circle work to do that day, and in the past I might have politely declined. But this time I really felt guided to help them, and we ended up spending a great day together. I even ended up getting all that Circle work done.

I'm doing more giving than before; my life is less about me and more about being helpful to others

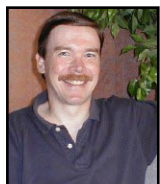
As I've followed the rules, I've felt my priorities shift. As I've been trying to follow the Holy Spirit throughout the day, I've felt less concerned about me and my needs, and more inclined to be of service to others. Helping my friends with their move is one example of this. Another example is helping another friend of mine deliver Christmas gifts to needy people on Christmas Eve morning. Now, don't get me wrong; no one would confuse me with Mother Teresa. But it does seem that I'm moving more in the direction of being truly helpful to others, and it feels good.

I have a deeper sense that my life is part of a larger plan

To the degree I've managed to set aside my own plans for my life through making no decisions by myself, it feels as if I've been swept up into a much larger plan. My life is not my own. I'm really getting more of a sense of the Holy Spirit orchestrating events and moving chess pieces for the sake of His holy purpose. This makes my life feel much more meaningful. It's not just about me me me; it's about doing my part in the most exalted and lofty plan imaginable: the Holy Spirit's plan for the salvation of the world.

I have more happy days

This is the culmination of all the previous points. I really have found that these rules for decision are "the rules that promise you a happy day." Sure, I still have my ups and downs. I'm not walking around in the kind of rapt ecstasy the Course expects us to experience when we're gazing constantly on the real world. But I'm certainly having more happy days than before. My days are coming closer to the day I imagine each morning, in which I'm perceiving the situations I encounter with love and devoting myself to loving service to others. I still have a ways to go on this journey, but it has become a far happier journey with these rules to guide me. If you too want more happy days, I encourage you to try the rules for decision yourself. What have you got to lose?



E-mail your comments to the author at: greg@circleofa.org

Greg Mackie is the author of *How Can We Forgive Murderers? And Other Answers to Questions about 'A Course in Miracles.'* He 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 a popular blog on the Circle of Atonement's website, and teaches the Circle's weekday Workbook class in Sedona, Arizona (along with Robert Perry). He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

Response to Our Call for Stories

At the end of Robert Perry's article in our last issue ("How Is Our Brother Our Savior?" *A Better Way* #60, December 2006), Robert invited people to share personal stories exemplifying the idea that our brother is our savior. We received the following beautiful story from Sally McKirgan.

The Greatest Gift

by Sally McKirgan

I have a true story, a beautiful experience really, about the greatest gifts I ever received.

It was Christmas 1987. Earlier that year, in April, I had started studying *A Course In Miracles*, and I had made the commitment to do one lesson each day no matter if I “got it” or not. I must have been on or about Lesson 245. At the time I was working in downtown San Francisco for my husband’s company and ran banking errands every afternoon. San Francisco was decked out as usual with wonderful Holiday decorations, and with the throngs of shoppers it was chaotic and exciting. The weather was cold and a damp; fog hung in the air. The afternoon sky was white with the chill. As I was returning to the office I stood on the corner across from Macy’s waiting for the light to change. I noticed a group of homeless people sitting in front of Macy’s, and in particular a young woman, sitting on a blanket with a child on her lap. The thought went through my mind: “That could be Mary and Jesus sitting on that hard street, needing a place to stay, cold and hungry.” As I stood there I reached into my purse, pulled out a dollar, and put it in my pocket, deciding I would give it to her when I walked by. The light turned green and I proceeded across the street with the crowd. As I approached I saw that she had golden reddish curly long hair and a freckled face with very fair skin. The baby was in her lap, wrapped in a blue blanket, and she was writing a sign with her free hand asking for money for help. Just as I leaned down to give her my dollar saying “God Bless,” she looked up and said “Thank You” in the warmest voice I have ever heard. Then our eyes locked. The gift I gave was puny and insignificant in comparison to what she gave me. Her gift was the sight of Great Heavenly Rays! As I looked down into her eyes, I saw Great Rays of light shooting heavenward, up to the right. It was only an instant. I was so shocked I stepped back immediately; eyes brimming with tears, I stumbled up the street. As I walked back to work I was in shock. What on earth was that? When I got to the office I started to tell my husband but my eyes filled with tears; I couldn’t speak and he was so busy he didn’t notice my bewilderment. I thought maybe I should go back and see her but actually felt afraid to do so! Words cannot do justice to the experience, of course.

I wrote a poem about it called “The Greatest Gift” (see below). I even tried to get it published, sent it to the *Examiner* and Macy’s, but no one believed it. They must have laughed! Later when I could talk about it, I told a few Course friends but my words fell on kindly but bewildered ears. Don’t blame them, as it sounds pretty weird!

In writing to you I just now tried to estimate out what lesson I could have been on. I started counting from mid-April to mid-December and figured around number 245. When I just now looked it up, it sounds like it set me up for the amazing day I had:

Your peace is with me, Father. I am safe. Your peace surrounds me, Father. Where I go, Your peace goes there with me. It sheds its light on everyone I meet. I bring it to the desolate and lonely and afraid. I give Your peace to those who suffer pain, or grieve for loss, or think they are bereft of hope and happiness. Send them to me, my Father. Let me bring your peace with me. For I would save Your Son, as is Your Will, that I may come to recognize my Self. (W-p11.245.Heading-1:8)

Wow!

The Course speaks of the Great Rays, but when this happened I was only reading the Workbook and not reading the Text so I did not know of their existence until later. Chapter 15 (“The Holy Instant”), Section IX (“The Holy Instant and the Attraction of God”) refers to the Great Rays: “As the ego would limit your perception of your brothers to the body, so would the Holy Spirit release your vision and let you see the Great Rays shining from them, so unlimited that they reach to God.” (T-15.IX.1:1). I think it was a holy instant that I experienced. With your immense expertise with the Course, you may see it differently. Below is the poem—I love rhyme as you can see.

The Greatest Gift

It happened one Christmas Season
in front of Macy's store
There she sat on O'Farrell Street
holding her baby near the door
On a thin blanket with the brightly
decorated windows behind
Her sweet blue bundle in her arms
the cold fog soon to entwine
And writing a sign with one hand
asking for money for help
Shoppers busily passed them by
with eyes and hearts unfelt
Because at Merry Christmas time
we are in such a crazy rush
We do not want to see the pain
and so our minds say "hush"
But when I saw her freckled face
and blond-red hair aflame
I thought: "Mary and Jesus
that could be their names!"
Taking money from my pocket
as I hastened across the street
And kneeling as I said "God Bless"
that's when our eyes did meet
What happened next mystifies me
as warmly she said "Thank You"
I fought back tears, I did not know
exactly where to turn to
The gifts she gave were Brilliant Rays
ascending to Heavenly Love
Rising up to the right entering
the Magnificence Above
It was as if a choir of Angels
had gathered nearby on wing
To glorify all life on earth and
Bach's Mass in B Minor to sing
Many times I have tried to explain
the vision from her blue eyes
But words seem so inadequate
and how can love be described?
How could that puny dollar have
deserved such a priceless gift
I was speechless and could hardly think
it left my heart bereft
The gift of grace she gave to me
was far grander than mine to her
Oh God above forever help me
be grateful for love so pure
You may not believe this miracle
seen in front of Macy's store
And it's been said to give not receive
is what this life may be for
But if you will believe and recall
come this Christmas Season
That when you give you too will receive
and God's Love is the Reason!

What We've Been Reading & Watching

Greg:

Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama tells his own amazing life story. The title really says it all: It's astounding to me that someone who has been through the tragedy of exile from his homeland, the killing of so many of his people, and the destruction of his culture can be so free of hatred and anger. His intelligence, compassion, humility, and humor shine on every page. A really inspiring book.

Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, by Karen Armstrong

Karen Armstrong's biography of the founder of Islam sheds new light on a truly remarkable man. What has always impressed me about Muhammad is how many different gifts he had: He was a great mystic, prophet, teacher, general, political leader, and social reformer all rolled into one. As you can see, lately I've been reading biographies of great spiritual leaders. Their devotion to their respective paths motivates me to walk the path of the Course with greater devotion.

A People's History of the United States, by Howard Zinn

Zinn gives us an account of US history from the point of view of people who don't usually make it into the standard history books: poor people, laborers, African Americans, Native Americans, women, etc. I've found the different perspective very illuminating. I've also been impressed with the tone of the book. Zinn is often critical of the US government and he clearly has a passion for justice for the "outcasts" of society, yet his attitude toward those he criticizes seems remarkably free of venom. It reminds me of the way Jesus critiques things like Christianity in the Course: He's not afraid to call it as he sees it, yet does so with a charitable attitude toward those with whom he disagrees.

Robert:

The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena* and *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality, both by Dean Radin

Dean Radin, senior scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, is one of the leading figures in contemporary parapsychology. In these books, he reviews the evidence for paranormal phenomena, focusing especially on those phenomena that have produced positive results in repeated experiments over decades. Even though the effects are usually relatively small, when multiple experiments are compiled and subjected to "meta-analysis," the odds often go into the trillions to one. The massive amount of evidence he presents, along with his even-handed style, make the skeptics sound like the ones engaging in faith-based thinking. It certainly appears that a century of experimental evidence has supported the idea that mind is a much more fundamental aspect of reality than scientists usually assume.

Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives, by Jim B. Tucker, M.D.

For the past forty years, doctors at the University of Virginia have investigated the claims of small children to remember a previous life. Up until now, this work, begun by the renowned Dr. Ian Stevenson, has communicated its findings to scientists. Now, in this book, it is being presented to a popular audience. These cases are quite impressive. The children seem to carry over not just memories from a previous life (in the form of correct statements about that life), but also birthmarks and birth defects (that match fatal wounds from the previous personality), "behaviors" (such as fears, loves, attachments, and addictions), and recognitions of people and places from the previous life. This is not a glib sell-job on reincarnation, but a presentation of painstakingly gathered evidence, that is very difficult to explain other than by appeal to reincarnation.

Dee (Circle webmaster):

***A Voice in the Wind*, by Francine Rivers**

As the story opens, Jerusalem has just fallen to Roman conquerors. Hadassah, is captured and sent to Rome where she is sold as a slave to a wealthy family. Hadassah is an early Christian, her father was healed by Jesus, and her faith remains strong during her passage to Rome and the transformation of her life. Hadassah exemplifies gentleness, living in the presence of God, and making her decisions with the Holy Spirit. In this uplifting story, the lives around her are transformed as the Holy Spirit works through this gentle slave girl. Francine Rivers yearns for "...the Lord to use my stories in making people thirst for His Word, the Bible". Though she writes from a traditional Christian view point, many of her stories strongly incorporate Course concepts. If you like this story you are in for a treat; it is one of three.

***Excavating Jesus, Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts*, by John Dominic Crossan & Jonathan Reed**

This book is about digging back through the past in an effort to understand the human Jesus in his own time and culture. Each author (one a biblical scholar, the other an archaeologist) selects what they feel are the ten most significant discoveries in their field that help us peel back the layers to get a clearer understanding of Jesus. Our local Lutheran Pastor is conducting a 4 week study in which we are discussing the themes from this fascinating book.

Pieces of April

April invites her estranged suburban parents to Thanksgiving dinner at her nearly invisible apartment on New York's Lower East Side. When her temperamental oven calls it quits, April must scramble to pull off the big event. This is a funny, heart warming film.

CIRCLE NEWS

Materials recently posted on our website

Many of you know this, but for those who don't, we post new material on the web site every week. Here is a list of recently posted articles and blog entries:

"Make this Year Different": How the Course Would Have Us Approach the New Year by *Robert Perry*. Is there a place for New Year's resolutions? Robert looks at instances in which Jesus counseled Helen and Bill on how to approach the new year. [Read more.](#)

Watching Your Mind for Thoughts that Block Healing by *Robert Perry*. Robert provides a series of 26 questions to help one identify common thoughts during a therapy session that get in the way of real healing. [Read more.](#)

How to Be Truly Helpful: Doing Course-Based Psychotherapy by *Robert Perry*. Robert summarizes the role of the therapist as helping the patient from the little self, through the inflated self, through the guilty self, to the true Self. Based on a close study of *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice*. [Read more.](#)

Leaving Las Vegas is *Greg Mackie's* most recent blog entry. [Read more.](#)

Study Groups: We've received a lot of questions about how to conduct Course study groups. Each group is unique, and any advice we offer would need to be adapted to the needs and desires of a particular group. And of course, asking the Holy Spirit for guidance is a vital part of discerning what a particular group should do. That being said, [here](#) are some guidelines we have found useful in conducting our groups.

Do you have a study group that primarily follows the Circle's approach to the Course or that uses the Circle's materials, that you would like us to list on our web site? If so, please send us an e-mail explaining, in a line or so, how your group is in keeping with our approach, or how it makes use of our materials. Please also provide us with the contact information to include with the listing. We will list study groups [here](#).