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A BETTER WAY

I Follow in the Way Appointed Me Reflections on Workbook Lesson 317

by Greg Mackie

Workbook Lesson 317, "I follow in the way appointed me," is a powerful and beautiful lesson. It is one of the Course's most direct statements of the idea that each of us has a specific part to play in God's plan for salvation, and completing that part is essential for the world's salvation and our own. I have been practicing this lesson frequently lately, so I thought I would share my personal reflections on it and invite you to explore its implications for your life as well.

In particular, I want to focus on the first paragraph of this two-paragraph lesson, the commentary paragraph. Robert has already written an excellent article on the second-paragraph prayer ("[All My Sorrows End in Your Embrace](#)," available on the Circle's website), so I will touch on the prayer only briefly. I hope these reflections will help you get in touch with your own God-given calling to save the world and the priceless rewards of following in the way appointed you.

The commentary paragraph

This paragraph has always been one of my favorites. It both calls us to take on our function as saviors of the world and gives us powerful incentives for doing so. Let's go through it line by line.

I have a special place to fill; a role for me alone.

This is what the Text calls our special function: "To each [the Holy Spirit] gives a special function in salvation he alone can fill; a part for only him" (T-25.VI.4:2). The Holy Spirit, "seeing your strengths exactly as they are, and equally aware of where they can be best applied, for what, to whom and when" (W-pI.154.2:2), gives each of us a part in God's plan for salvation that is uniquely suited to us, something that we can do as no one else could. Even our limitations stemming from our current level of development are turned into assets to the plan; as the *Psychotherapy* supplement says about therapists, "Whatever stage he is in, there are patients who need him just that way" (P-2.I.4:5).

The special function idea has always been immensely comforting to me. When I was growing up, I really had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I chose a college major just because it sounded interesting, and after I graduated I drifted from one job to another without any real sense of purpose. Gradually, though, my life's purpose of walking the Course's path and helping others do the same fell into place, and life has never been the same since. A meaningful function is what makes life worth living. And I'm also tremendously reassured by the idea that there are people who need me just the way I am right now. I'm all too aware of my shortcomings and limitations; it's easy for me to fall into the trap of "I'm such a screw up, how can He possibly use *me*?" What a relief to find out that He's got a particular job for me that literally no one else could possibly do better.

This is true of all of us, so think about your own life. Think about your strengths, your unique life situation, and the promptings of your heart. What might be your special place to fill in God's plan for salvation? What might be the role intended for you alone?

Salvation waits until I take this part as what I choose to do.

This line too echoes the special function material from the Text. Immediately after telling us that each person has a "spe-

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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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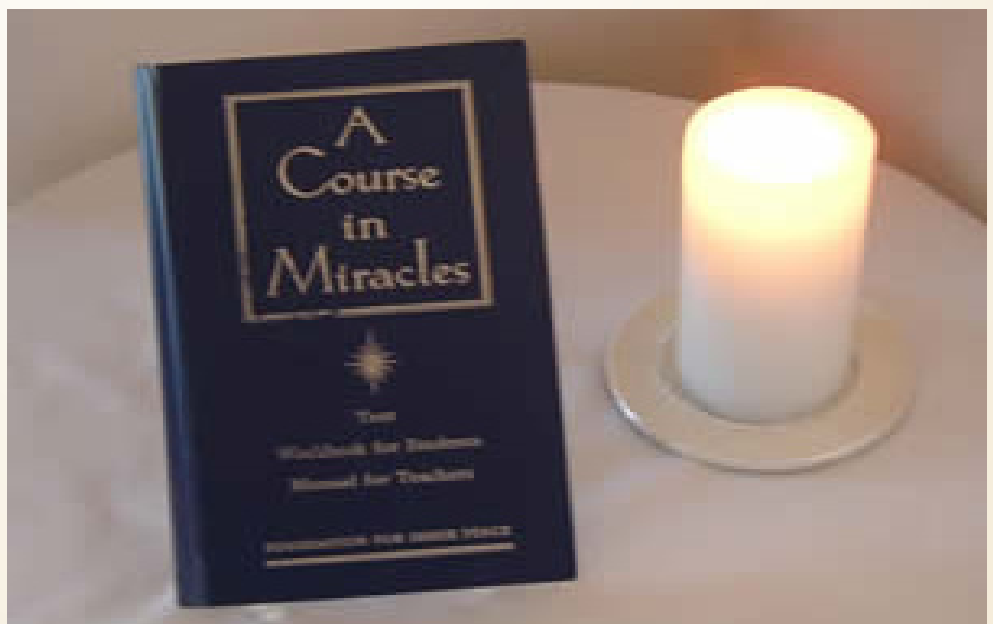
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cial function in salvation,” Jesus says, “Nor is the plan complete until he finds his special function, and fulfills the part assigned to him” (T-25.VI.4:3). Think of that: Salvation waits until each and every one of us gets up off the couch, rolls up her sleeves, and sees the unique salvation project she has been given through to completion. None of us is expendable; the Holy Spirit truly needs all hands on deck.

This sentence is a major incentive for me to get off my duff. I can be incredibly lazy, and there’s a part of me that says (especially because I’m such a screw up—see previous point) that the Holy Spirit can handle things just fine without me. But if my laziness is keeping others in bondage, it’s time to get busy. I’ve always been deeply moved by a passage from Lesson 191: “Do not withhold salvation longer. Look about the world, and see the suffering there. Is not your heart willing to bring your weary brothers rest?” (W-pI.191.10:6-8). When I look about the world, I see not only the suffering we all read about in the papers—the earthquake in China, the cyclone in Myanmar—but the daily pains and sorrows all beings experience just by virtue of (apparently) being frail bodies at the mercy of a cruel world. Of course I want to bring my weary brothers rest.

I also see an answer here to a dilemma that is sometimes called “disaster fatigue.” When we look about the world and see how much suffering there really is, we may feel compassion, but we often feel overwhelmed as well. “The problems are so huge and endless and complicated. It all seems so much bigger than me. What can I do?” This sentence, however, is the perfect antidote for this. What can I do? My own part. I needn’t do more than that; indeed, I shouldn’t *try* to do more than that. I need to trust that others will (eventually) do their parts in the larger plan; my own job is to make sure I do mine, which the Holy Spirit assures me is not overwhelming at all. I will probably find it challenging at times, but it’s something that I’m perfectly capable of doing. After all, it was designed just for me.

We all have a bit of laziness in us, and it’s all too easy to lock the world’s suffering out of our minds. It always feels a bit suspect to me when people tell me with obvious pride that they never watch the news, as if that’s the “spiritual” thing to do. So, you may want to ask yourself: Are my eyes open to the suffering all around me? Is not my heart willing to bring my weary brothers rest? Do I want their salvation to wait? For it *does* wait until I take my part in God’s plan for salvation as what I choose to do. Am I willing to take this part?

Until I make this choice, I am the slave of time and human destiny.

This line has a deep effect on me, especially that part about being “the slave of time and human destiny.” It echoes other statements in the Course about the wearying effects of time. “Time, with its illusions of change and death, wears out the world and all things in it” (M-1.4:7). The world is “old and tired and ready to return to dust even as you made it” (T-13.VII.3:5). Everywhere around us is relentless decay, dissolution, and death, and we seem powerless to stop it. We really *do* seem to be the slaves of time and human destiny.

As I look on my own life, it is not difficult to see that. Even at age 44, I am feeling the “crumbling assault of time” (T-13.VII.3:3). (I’m sure older people are chuckling at this—“You think it’s bad *now*...”) My temples are graying, my aches and pains are growing, and as I observe the hospice patients I work with, I know exactly where I’m going. No matter how much money I make, how many friends I have, how successful my career is, or how many worldly things I accumulate, I truly can’t take it with me. As long as I pursue worldly goals, I will have a meaningless life that ends in death.

This gives me another powerful incentive to take that part God has assigned me. Do I really want my life to be nothing more than an inexorable and futile march to the grave? I can really see that this is all it would be without a function that makes it truly meaningful. Until I do what God calls me to do in this world, until I am “a savior to the holy ones especially entrusted to [my] care” (T-31.VII.8:3), my life will feel empty and hopeless. “Futility of function not fulfilled will haunt you while your brother lies asleep, till what has been assigned to you is done” (T-24.VI.9:3). Fulfilling my function is my only way out of hopelessness, my only chance at real peace and happiness.

You may want to look at your own life from this perspective. As you reflect on where your life is going, can you get in touch with the futility of the pursuit of worldly goals, the meaninglessness of it all, the inevitability of suffering and death? Might taking your part in God’s plan for salvation (or committing to it more fully if you feel you already have taken it) lead to a more meaningful life, to a life that offers a real chance at peace and happiness?

But when I willingly and gladly go the way my Father’s plan appointed me to go,

The key words here are “willingly and gladly.” Even if we do get in touch with how rotten “time and human destiny” are, we still resist God’s plan, because we assume that it would be even worse. It’s such a sacrifice, we tell ourselves; why should we give up our worldly consolations for the grim life of the saint? The Course, however, is adamant that doing God’s Will is not a sacrifice, but in fact the only way to “perfect happiness” (W-pI.101.Heading). The pleasures we cherish in this world are really painful; the stuff we endlessly try to accumulate is really nothing; our worldly

“consolations” are really barriers to true consolation. True happiness will only come when we “willingly and gladly give over every plan but His” (T-15.IV.4:2). It will come only when we do our part in that plan.

I love the idea that doing my part in salvation isn’t a sacrifice but the way to happiness, and I’ve found it to be true in my experience. Yet the belief that following God’s Will is a sacrifice of my best interests still persists in a big way. Lately, Robert and I have been marveling at an odd phenomenon: Every time we truly give to other people (which is the means to salvation), we experience a deep happiness that cannot be found any other way. Yet in spite of all this evidence that giving is happiness, we so easily revert to the bedrock assumption of our world that giving is a drain, a loss. What this tells me is that we need to do a *lot* of giving to overcome our obstinate belief that giving as God would have us do equals sacrifice. One technique I’ve found useful is to make a real effort to *remember* just how unsatisfying my worldly pursuits have actually been, and how wonderful I’ve felt every time I’ve followed God’s plan for me and truly given to other people. This helps me willingly and gladly do more of the latter.

You may want to examine your own life to see how true this is for you. Think of some of the worldly goals you’ve pursued, and think as well of some of the times that you’ve really felt in touch with your part in God’s plan, the times you’ve selflessly given to others. Which of these things has really made you happy? When you look at the real outcomes here, do you have a greater incentive to willingly and gladly go the way your Father’s plan appointed you to go?

then will I recognize salvation is already here, already given all my brothers and already mine as well.

Here is the big payoff, and it is big indeed. The previous sentences already imply that by doing our part, we’ll save the world and ourselves from slavery to time and human destiny. Our normal assumption is that this means salvation will happen far in the future; we shall overcome *someday*. But here, we discover that the reward is even better than that: When we accept our God-given part in salvation, we will recognize that salvation for both our brothers and ourselves is *already here*. True, the plan will still unfold in time, and we won’t see it fully realized in time until everyone does his or her part. But paradoxically, in some real sense it has already been accomplished, and the endpoint can be experienced *now*. In fact, that endpoint is in some inexplicable way guiding us to its full realization: “In the dream of time [the ending] seems to be far off. And yet, in truth, it is already here; already serving us as gracious guidance in the way to go” (W-FI.In.2:3-4).

What good news, and what a relief! The fact that the plan is already accomplished means that I can’t really screw it up in a way that will prevent salvation from happening. How can I prevent something that has already happened? Yet though the end result is guaranteed, how quickly the plan unfolds in time (and therefore how much suffering is averted) depends on how soon each of us takes our part, so the paragraph as a whole doesn’t counsel complacency at all. There is a crucial balance between a sense of *urgency* that we take our part as soon as possible, and a sense of *assurance* that the attainment of the goal is certain no matter what.

I think we need both aspects: Neither an attitude of “Everyone must do their function perfectly now or we’re doomed” nor “What function? We’re already saved anyway” will do. This final sentence captures that balance perfectly: We must willingly and gladly *do* our part in God’s plan for salvation in order to truly *recognize* that salvation is already here. Is this not a recognition you want? What could be more desirable? Doesn’t this make you want to let go of complacency and really do your part?

The prayer

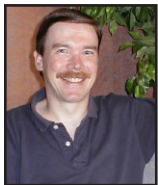
The beautiful prayer that follows the commentary paragraph is a declaration to God that we have made the decision that paragraph has encouraged us to make. The decision is right there in the prayer’s opening line: “Father, your way is what I choose today.” Indeed, the goal of the entire lesson is to get us to make this crucial choice to follow in the way appointed us.

Throughout the rest of the prayer, we see echoes of themes from the first paragraph. Each of us has a unique assignment, so we need to follow God’s guidance very specifically: “Where [Your way] would lead me do I choose to go; what it would have me do I choose to do.” When we follow this way, salvation will come with certainty to everyone who has suffered through the seemingly endless sorrows of time and human destiny: “Your way is certain, and the end secure. The memory of You awaits me there. And all my sorrows end in Your embrace.” That way *must* be certain, for salvation is already here; we have never actually left God’s embrace. The Son of God only “thought mistakenly that he had wandered from the sure protection of Your loving Arms.” If we realized all this, how could we *not* follow His way willingly and gladly?

The prayers in the Course are meant to be actually prayed. So now, with all that we have explored in mind, I invite you to pray this prayer with all the sincerity you can muster. Declare to God that you have chosen the unique role that

He has given you in His plan for salvation, today and every day. Don't worry if you feel your declaration isn't wholly sincere; just make the decision now, and trust that the very act of affirming it will strengthen your commitment to it. As for God's help in keeping that commitment. Perhaps today you will discover the priceless joy of realizing you have never really left His loving Arms. At the very least you may find, as I have, that this prayer helps you follow in the way appointed you with more willingness and gladness than you ever thought possible:

Father, Your way is what I choose today. Where it would lead me do I choose to go; what it would have me do I choose to do. Your way is certain, and the end secure. The memory of You awaits me there. And all my sorrows end in Your embrace, which You have promised to Your Son, who thought mistakenly that he had wandered from the sure protection of Your loving Arms. (W-pII.317.2:1-5)



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

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.

Miracles Boomeritis Questionnaire

by Robert Perry

In the last issue, I shared my impression that we were thinking of boomeritis as something “out there.” To help us explore it as something potentially “in here,” I have developed this questionnaire. It is my admittedly subjective attempt to measure the presence of the Course strain of the virus, which I have called “miracles boomeritis.” (If you need clarity on what boomeritis is, please read my original article on the subject, “[Miracles Boomeritis](#).” You may also want to read the follow-up, “[A Conversation with Readers about Miracles Boomeritis](#)”).

To use the questionnaire, simply write down a number for each question:

- 4 = strongly agree
- 3 = agree
- 2 = neutral
- 1 = disagree
- 0 = strongly disagree

Try to be as honest as you possibly can. Try not to think, “If I answer this way, it will increase my boomeritis score.” It might help, after reading the question, to let a number from 0 to 4 just pop into your head and then have that be what you write down.

The purpose of this questionnaire is not to identify how guilty you are for having boomeritis. Its purpose is the same as that of identifying a virus in your body: You can't treat something until you diagnose it. Beating yourself up over a diagnosis just gets in the way of healing the malady.

There will be additional instructions at the end.

Authority

1. I see God as impersonal and uninvolved with my life. After all, He doesn't even know I am here.
2. I talk about Holy Spirit more than God (and usually drop the “the” before “Holy Spirit”). I don't really speak to God or pray to God.
3. My authority is the Holy Spirit moving through my own intuitions and feelings. Nothing can overrule this. Based on it, I draw from whatever books, teachings, and teachers feel right to me.
4. I don't talk about God's Will or God's plan for my life. That sounds too much like old-time religion.
5. I follow my bliss rather than some plan from on high.
6. I believe in Jesus, but I don't really see my Jesus as having much connection with Jesus of Nazareth who lived in ancient Palestine.
7. The Manual for Teachers is not talking about actual teachers. We are all teachers and students of each other.
8. Any sort of human hierarchy violates the Course's teaching that we are all equals.

Relationships

9. The Course is all about healing my own mind, not about trying to save other people, and especially not about saving the world.
10. A miracle is just a shift in my perception. It is not something I “perform” to heal someone else.
11. Forgiving is not about trying to make someone else feel better, relieved, less guilty. Rather, it rests on realizing that there is no one out there.
12. To me, a relationship is made holy when I hold it in a holy place inside of me. Its holiness really doesn’t have anything to do with the other person.
13. If I have to wait for the other person to join me in a holy relationship, I could wait forever.
14. Focusing on joining with others in the illusion is a misplaced focus. Doesn’t the Course warn against trying to join bodies?
15. My guilt comes from my original separation with God. Its source is not me being unkind to other people right now.
16. Other people are my saviors because by pushing my ego’s buttons, they make me aware of my unconscious ego so that I can let it go.
17. Putting a big focus on helping other people is not the Course. I mainly need to forgive them in my own mind and empower them by reminding them of their own divine power.
18. The main thing I need to be concerned about in relation to helping others is doing it for ego reasons, especially because I want to prove how good I am.
19. One of my key growth issues is being strong enough to set my boundaries, so that I don’t repeat my old mistakes of overextending myself for the sake of the approval of others.
20. I am not supposed to feel responsible for others. The Course says that my sole responsibility is to accept the Atonement for myself.

Behavior

21. The Course is not about behavior. What matters is what you think in your mind, not what you do behaviorally. After all, doesn’t the Course say “I need do nothing” and “seek not to change the world”?
22. Ethical concerns miss the point. For instance, how can lying matter when all behavior is an illusion and all of us are lying just by being here?
23. Being politically active means just trying to change the illusion. I try to avoid the news so that I don’t get caught up in the illusion.
24. My special function is really just forgiving certain key people in my life so that I can find peace. It is not an actual role I carry out in the world to contribute to a better world.
25. Doesn’t trying to serve others, such as the poor, just reinforce the idea that they *are* poor? Shouldn’t we just remind them that they create their reality and that they can create a new one?

Truth

26. I don’t relate to truth as some kind of invariable outside thing to which I must bow. Truth is whatever is true for me. It’s whatever feels right inside me.
27. When I decide what is true, my feelings are my main guides. Facts are important but secondary.
28. The Course is not about beliefs. It is about experience. Beliefs can’t get us out of the ego; they are *of* the ego.
29. Any time we start talking about differences and disagreements, we are in ego. The truth sees no differences, only oneness.
30. The intellect is closely tied to the ego. At best, the intellect can help you get around in this world. But it cannot help you awaken spiritually.
31. Only the ego wants to be right, and only the ego calls something wrong. Spirit is beyond such distinctions, which of course are just judgments.

Understanding and following *A Course in Miracles*

32. There is no one right interpretation of the Course. The search for the “right” interpretation of the Course is the enterprise of competing egos.
33. The Course was meant to be read differently through each pair of eyes. The interpretation I should be concerned with is the one that works for me.
34. If you disagree with another person about something in the Course, you should tear out the page.

35. The Course isn't meant to be studied, but experienced. Studying it just turns it into an intellectual exercise.
36. The Course is so simple. It really just says the same thing over and over again. When we get into deep discussions of its sophisticated teachings, we are just overcomplicating it.
37. We shouldn't focus too much on the words of the Course. After all, words are but symbols of symbols.
38. I love that part where it says "forget this course."
39. I interpret the Course in whatever way the Holy Spirit prompts me to from within.
40. I don't think we are supposed to follow the letter of the Course. That's fundamentalism. Didn't the Bible say that the letter killeth?
41. It's a trap to try hard to follow the Workbook's instructions. That means I'm making it into a ritual because I want to please some Big Daddy in the sky.
42. If I can forgive myself for not doing the Workbook right, then I have really learned the Workbook's lesson.
43. Discipline is forcing myself because some outside voice told me to. Instead, in each moment I need to spontaneously follow the promptings of the Voice within.
44. Following only the Course is like traditional religion, where there is only one truth. I follow many teachings because all truth is one.
45. The Course is a self-study course. When we start talking about teachers and centers and especially churches, we turn it into a religion, which is not what Jesus wanted.

Positive psychological orientation

46. I try to see everything as positive, as being exactly what it should be. I often say "It's perfect" or "It's all good." Otherwise, I'm judging.
47. I don't often say I was wrong or made a mistake. What others see as mistakes I see as what was right for me in that moment. I was simply walking the path I needed to walk.
48. What some may see as me being unkind and self-serving, I see as me claiming my truth and expressing my empowerment.
49. The spiritual path is less about living some saintly life than about freely expressing what is within. Laughing, celebrating, dancing, breathing, the ability to emote without shame—these are the hallmarks of a spiritual person.
50. I don't believe in expending energy looking for my ego. That is a negative focus. That means getting down on myself rather than affirming my divinity.
51. I don't think I should label my ego "wrong" or "evil." My proper stance toward it should be to love it, to embrace it, to treat it with compassion.
52. My ego tries to tell me that I haven't gotten very far spiritually. I need to resist that voice and claim how advanced I really am. I still have lessons left, but I'm at least 80% of the way there.

Experience

53. The reason for doing the Course is to exchange my judgmental, depressed inner states for peaceful, blissful inner states. This will automatically make a contribution to the lives of others, but that contribution is a byproduct, not a direct and central goal of the Course.
54. Feelings are more important, and closer to spirit, than thoughts.
55. Words and thinking are abstractions from direct experience. They distance me from direct experience.
56. Children are closer to spirit than we are. They just experience, rather than overlaying their experience with judgment. Society hasn't had a chance yet to train them into having an ego. They are my teachers.
57. Play is a more direct expression of my true nature than work.
58. Animals are closer to spirit than we are. They live in the moment, at one with their bodies, and flow freely with their natural impulses. They live in a natural state that I have lost touch with.
59. The essence of spirituality is being in touch with the sights, sounds, and sensations of this moment, rather than distancing myself from the moment with my judgments and mental overlays.
60. Spirituality is about spontaneously following my own inner impulses, rather than trying to enforce rules and standards and "shoulds" on myself.
61. My ability to dream, imagine, and fantasize is ultimately a spiritual faculty. Its spiritual value is that it allows my mind to roam free of the constraints of reality.
62. Spiritual states are the measure of spiritual advancement. I decide that someone is "spiritual" mainly based on knowing that person has had high spiritual experiences rather than based on that person's character as manifest in his or her relationships.

Having written down numbers for each question, now simply add up your total score. Potential scores run from 0 to 248. The higher your score, the more miracles boomeritis you have. Just for convenience, you can use the following scale to estimate the presence of miracles boomeritis in your mind:

0 – 10: boomeritis-free
11-124: mild case
125-248: severe case

I think it would be very useful for as many of you as possible to send me your scores and comments. If you don't want me to print your name and comments, either say so or just send me your score by itself, which I will then add into an overall average.



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

Robert Perry. *He is the author or co-author of twenty books and booklets, including Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'.*

CIRCLE MAILBOX

Reader Responses to “A Conversation with Readers about Miracles Boomeritis”

Two issues ago in A Better Way, I [Robert] wrote an article entitled “Miracles Boomeritis.” Boomeritis is a term coined by Integral philosopher Ken Wilber to describe an intellectual virus that he sees spreading through academia, the humanities, liberal politics, and “every form of religion and spirituality in today’s world.” Boomeritis starts with the idea that “Viewpoints other than mine have validity,” goes from there to “Since all viewpoints are valid, there is no absolute truth,” and ends up with “Since there is no absolute truth, nothing can impose its truth on me. Nobody tells me what to do!” I claimed that the influence of boomeritis is pervasive among students of A Course in Miracles and then asked to have a conversation with readers, asking in particular for their thoughts on the following questions:

Is there such a thing as boomeritis? What are your thoughts and feelings about it? Should we try to distinguish the Course from boomeritis? Is that a useful exercise? Is boomeritis compatible with the Course? Do you think that you have been influenced by it, that you are a carrier? What do you think we should do about the whole thing? Please write and let me know. And we will take it from there.

I received a number of responses, and printed them (with my replies) in an article entitled “A Conversation with Readers about Miracles Boomeritis, which appeared in the last issue of A Better Way. What follows are the responses I received to that conversation, with my replies.

— Robert

...

From Margaret Stuart:

I read your overall remarks to the comments on the “boomeritis” article from a number of us; actually, I read and reread it a number of times. I think that you have hit the nail on the head for the comments on the “out there” versus “in here.” It was almost as if we collectively were smugly commenting on something we feel very superior about, as Course students, versus those who aren't. However, it is difficult, I suppose, to be able to comment on the unconscious lenses one wears as if one is conscious of them. It is like trying to prove the body doesn't exist from inside the body! It is also difficult (or at least

I find it difficult) to admit one's own self has some narcissistic tendencies. It is much easier to point them out in others. However, that is not an excuse, and your comments make it all the more important to pay attention to the words and ideas of the Course as they are written, and try to really contemplate what they mean, being aware that we may be putting a "boomeritis" spin on them.

So, that being said, how does one make a Course study, and *not* put a "boomeritis" spin on the ideas? I can't say that I am really aware that that is what I am doing, but I don't know why I would be any different, if "boomeritis" is pervasive in Course communities. I can tell you what I try to do: when I study the lessons, I repeat them to myself, and repeat them, to really take each word and understand what it is that God would like me to be thinking or feeling. So, how do I know that it is not "boomeritis" I am paying attention to? I don't know, but there are some rare times when I do get a very small but overwhelming feeling of unbridled joy—it is in those moments that I think I might be on the right track. Again, is it "boomeritis"? Is the way you can tell, if you are not allowing God to be the ultimate authority? I would be interested in your thoughts on how one might detect "boomeritis" while studying, so as to be more aware of it, to combat it.

Also, you mentioned something about not hearing any views about liking "boomeritis." I must admit, I do like the pluralistic aspects of it—the idea that there are various perspectives that are valid, not just the "white-bread Mid-Western/European male" view. Where I think trouble brews, is when other beliefs/ways of life trample on an individual's right to live and love. For an extreme example, "honor killing" of daughters when they disobey their fathers in Pakistan, and other parts of the world that view women a certain way. That rule to me is *not* an authority that is worth giving credence to, and only promotes fear in both daughters and fathers (daughters fear for losing their lives, and fathers fear for living with the shame of disobedient daughters), which from what I understand is the opposite of love, which is then not following what God wants.

Hope these thoughts aren't too scattered, but I wanted you to know that your overall remarks at least will make me more aware of how "boomeritis" might be affecting me, and my understanding of the Course. Thank you for the "nudge."

Margaret,

*You bring up a great question: How does one study the Course and not put a boomeritis spin on it? I can only tell you what I do. When I read the Course, my main attempt is to get in touch with the "voice" on the page, the specific content which that page is trying to convey to me. I treat this voice as independent of my voice. I take it as a matter of course that this voice is trying to convey something that is different from how I normally think. This difference takes many forms. That page's message can differ with my current understanding of the Course. I am always watching out for that. If I spot it, I take it as a badge of my honesty. Or that page can tell me something new, something I never thought of before, something I never understood the Course to be saying. This is nearly always the case. It is one of my primary experiences of getting in touch with the authentic voice on the page. Or it can tell me something I already understand from the Course, yet something that is different from how I normally perceive things in daily life. This doesn't move my understanding of the Course, but it does move **me**. Or it can tell me something I already understand, yet put the emphasis in a new, different, or unexpected place. This helps me get in touch with the Course's value system, which is so different than my own.*

*So my overall approach to reading the Course is to see the voice on its pages as essentially **acting on** me, in some way moving me to a new place. Every time I sit down with it, that's what I'm aiming for. If all it does is confirm everything in me, through and through, then why am I reading it? What good does it do me? My focus, then, is on looking for and celebrating the **differences** between me and it. It is in those differences that the Course can change me, can lift me to a new level.*

I think this is the antidote to reading the Course with a boomeritis spin. In that mode, I think we are looking for agreement between the Course and us. We are looking for confirmation. We are looking for the comfort of seeing on the page those familiar truths that we already know. The more we say, "Ah, yes, I knew that; that's what I expected to hear," the more we can be sure we are projecting our own beliefs onto the Course and obscuring its own voice.

Thank you for the question. It actually helped me identify a key thing that I have never articulated before.

...

From Mary Benton:

If I may I'd like to make some clarifications of my position on this.

The summary of this phenomenon in your original article would need some unpacking. I explicitly didn't address this in detail in my response, partly for time and space considerations. My main aim was to put the issue into a broader context, while coming to some practical conclusions as well.

There are certainly misinterpretations of the Course (in my opinion) and also some gross misinterpretations of the teachings of some Course teachers. In my experience this is par for the course on most spiritual paths. At the same time I don't agree with you that most students are misinterpreting the Course—this is too broad a generalization. How could anybody know that, even if we all agreed about Course interpretation, which we don't?

In your "Overall remarks" you say "no one really had any suggestions about what to do even at a purely personal level." I can't speak for other respondents, but I certainly *did* make some suggestions. Besides giving encouragement to Course discourse—teachers and students speaking and writing about these matters (while noting the limitations of attempts at persuasion at this level) I specifically described my recent experience in Workbook practice. This was particularly potent because it came while I was drafting my letter to you. During this practice, and afterwards, the concerns of the ego fell away and with this change of mind I experienced what the Course is really about—the peace of God. The peace of God produces a totally new perspective. From this point I realized the most important thing for us in any circumstance is to accept and therefore extend the peace of God.

Practicing the Course ourselves doesn't stop there. Quite the contrary, it is the way the peace of God (containing all healing and miracles) can be extended. From Lesson 97: "The Holy Spirit will be glad to take five minutes of each hour from your hands, and carry them around this aching world where pain and misery appear to rule. He will not overlook one open mind that will accept the healing gifts they bring, and He will lay them everywhere He knows they will be welcome. And they will increase in healing power each time someone accepts them as his thoughts, and uses them to heal."

All this from practicing one lesson.

The answer to all problems is right there in the Course. Lesson 122 points this out unequivocally. "Here is the answer! Seek no more. You will not find another one instead." *A Course in Miracles* is the better way Helen and Bill requested. Whatever the perceived problem, the Course is the answer for its students. Could we do better than to follow its instructions for all problems, in all circumstances?

A person "in error" may or may not yield to our persuasion about the teaching of the Course (which isn't to say we shouldn't speak the truth as we understand it, or engage in dialogue or whatever) but the peace of God, extended through us, could heal us both. I think this is the real answer the Course is offering us all.

Mary,

I apologize for not realizing that your discussion of doing the Workbook was your suggestion for what to do about boomeritis. Call me jaded, but I have too much faith in our ability to reinterpret the Workbook lessons, and even the peace of God, in boomeritis terms. On the other hand, I would never want to underplay the importance of either the lessons or the peace of God. They, of course, are the real meat. I just think that in addition to that real meat, we should also have discussions that aim at clarity and clarification, which I think you are saying as well.

...

From Steven Lanigan:

As you point out, probably the greatest impediment to the (public's) open-minded investigation of the Course is their erroneous equation of it with New Age thought, which it predates, and is actually distinct from....

And within the Course community, it seems the greatest "nullification" of the Course (along with a persisting rejection of qualified higher authority) is our dogged insistence on "blending/transplanting" incompatible beliefs from other paths into it. Sadly, attempting to courteously question those beliefs, even in longtime Course study groups, often immediately elicits that "wall of resistance" you've spoken of. ("Urgency is egoic"... "Need do nothing"... "Universal curriculum means that..." etc.) A prompt interruption of examining what the Course says, by a "steamroller" of Course "lore" swiftly substituted instead.

I recently pointed out to a Course friend (one whose stance is that the Course is basically "no different" and is merely "restating" things already long ago completely said) that, based on very-consistent patterns in our own study group, it's likely that, if Jesus himself (incognito) "physically" attended one of our study sessions and dared, in a golden, "teachable moment," to courteously point out what the Course has to say on a subject...that it (demonstrably!) wouldn't be fifteen seconds before someone would rather condescendingly interrupt him, saying his concern was merely "just his ego" prod- ding, rather than our Teacher's lovingly insistent attempts to highlight harmful errors...errors begging to be brought to

truth.

He, unruffled, agreed.

I then remarked that, to whatever extent that realization *doesn't* “scare the bejeebies outa us,” it could well reflect an alarming degree of complacency and avoidance....He grew thoughtful, also, when I shared Greg Mackie's observation on how it was [a “classic”] in Course groups to promptly interrupt profitable inquiries with the dread, reflexive “egoic” labeling...in order to “protect” ideas otherwise “threatened” by Course teachings.

I liked your earlier definition of “patient urgency,” Robert...and your likening of the Course to the “magic bullet” for “cancer”...which we Course students [so largely] seem in no particular hurry to share with the world...we who, as you reminded, are [Jesus'] “voice...eyes...feet...hands through which I save the world.” How tragic....

Robert, thank you all at the Circle for your willingness to participate in being Jesus' “voice”....for remaining gracious under criticism, courteous and open-minded, kindly-but-firmly persistent, and open to guidance, in the face of the multiple challenges the Course is presently facing. We certainly cannot afford to indulge in fearfulness and timidity. Far too much, and “too precious,” is at stake for that.

Should you feel so led, I'd love to hear more from y'all (okay, a “Tennesseism”!) on the subject of what you envision Course students' “bestowing of miracles” where directed might “look like” in our lives/communities/world.

Steven,

Thank you for your response (I'm sorry that I had to edit it down for length). We clearly share a similar outlook. I like your suggestion about what bestowing miracles might look like. We might just take you up on that.

• • •

From Jeremy Stutsman:

Robert, in your response to D. Patrick Miller on the subject of “boomeritis” you say:

Teachings shape us. And until we confess that we have been taking in a distorted teaching, it is impossible for us to follow the real one. For example, if one were to switch from “it's all about my peace; there's no one out there” to “those are my brothers and they need my help,” one could easily step into a whole different life. One would certainly be following a different teaching. So personally, I think it is helpful to define and even name this particular form of self-absorption.

I think you make a very good point. No doubt it is true that when many people say that “it is about my peace; there is no one out there” the hidden (probably unconscious) message is really: *the separate ego, me, is all that is important; I can dismiss the views of other egos because they are not real.* And no doubt they (again probably unconsciously) include the author of the Course as one of those separate egos out there whose views don't matter as much as “my own”; because, again, *there are no others out there.*

But we are walking on a very narrow edge and if we are careless we simply maintain our self-deception. It is certainly the case that when *we* present arguments on a position it is the ego's arguments no matter how carefully we try to parrot the Course. It is not the words that matter. The ego takes the Course's arguments and uses those words to maintain its grip on our minds. To repeat: *It is not the words that matter.* When *we* use any thoughts and words to make a point, it is the ego's point that is being made. When Jesus uses them, speaking to our inner recognition of truth, it is the Holy Spirit's teaching. This is true not because Jesus is some idol for us to worship and to hold sacrosanct; it is true because he has overcome the ego; *we* have not.

So, it is no doubt true that when I say that there are no others out there, I am simply using these words to maintain my identification with the ego. But it is also true that when I say that *my brothers need my help* I am also doing the same; defending the ego. In this latter case, I truly believe that I am a separate ego among others who need my help, making me in some sense special.

So, both sides of that argument lead only to the ego's game—when used by *us*! The ego is very clever!

It is no doubt true that the thoughts and words that I am using now are serving the ego in my mind. The question is: am I aware that every word I utter—each of those that are not the Holy Spirit speaking through me in a holy instant—is a word spoken from the ego's agenda?! A sobering thought! Yet the ego is willing to acknowledge even this truth in its arrogant confidence that it can blank out the true significance of it in all the moments that matter. *But the fact is, regardless of the ego's confidence, I am becoming more and more aware of the ego's game, even as my mouth utters the words*

that maintain it.

What matters is simply our (or actually, the Son of God's) gradually growing awareness of the ego's game and the significance of this game for His sanity....

As always, our focus must be on listening to the Holy Spirit, not correcting others. However, at the same time, I believe that it is also true that Jesus seems to work even through our egos to accomplish his mission. So Jesus is able to help undo the errors of the Son's mind by acting in the world of form through our ego-laden minds. There is no doubt, for example, that Ken Wilber's criticism of "boomeritis" your article, and all of this discussion will help some minds to recognize the ego's game within and to move these minds (the Son's mind, really) gradually to awakening.

It seems as if Jesus is asking us not to correct our brother. But since the Son is still sleeping, some of us *will* attempt to correct our brother and Jesus will use these ego-laden minds to speak words that will nevertheless spread the ideas of his correction so that some minds will awaken in the Son's dream (the world). The ego is not the only clever system of thought! Jesus' way goes beyond clever: it is powerful wisdom!

Clearly it is always helpful to point students of the Course to the Course's actual teaching. And the Course itself has plenty of statements that prick a hole in the boomeritis balloon. But I think that patiently and accurately pointing out Course teaching, not directed to errant students in particular, is a better way to go, rather than discussing boomeritis as some virus, disease, etc. The alarmist position is clearly a fearful one and an ego position.

Additionally, what is overlooked in all this discussion is that the issue is *not* between "self only" (narcissism) and "helping others" (rescuing). Both positions are clearly countered in the Course. We can only save others by changing our own mind. *That* is the Course teaching as I understand it. And if I am wrong about that then we do indeed need to have a discussion about *that*, not boomeritis, which only confuses the matter.

Jeremy,

If I understand your point (which I have regrettably had to edit down), you are saying that when we use words or thoughts to make a point, it is the ego's point being made, and that progress for us means becoming aware of this game of the ego. It sounds as if we can't really pull our thoughts and words out of this game. We can only notice the game while still playing it.

I have to say that my understanding of the Course is quite different. I believe that it asks us to not simply become aware of the egoic nature of our thoughts and words (which it does), but to think and speak in a new way, in a way that expresses a new content.

*So much of the Course is about us adopting new thoughts, much of which takes place through us repeating the Course's words (as in the Workbook lessons), or even coming up with our own Course-based words (as we do in the important practice of "letting related thoughts come," which begins in Lesson 42). It would be very strange if, as soon as I repeated the words the Course gave me, or came up with my own words as it instructed me, those words were classified as ego. Yes, they are within the ego's framework, but they are designed to slowly lead me **out** of that framework.*

*Then, as we embrace these new thoughts from the Course, we are supposed to reflect these thoughts in our words to our brothers. "The teacher of God...must learn to use words in a new way. Gradually, he learns how to let his words be chosen for him" (M-21.4:4-5). When we use words in this new way, they are then raised "from meaningless symbols to the Call of Heaven Itself" (M-21.5:9). Quite a statement! If we pass on the words given us by the Holy Spirit, are those words ego just because **we** have spoken them? For instance, Jesus often instructed Helen to "tell Bill" something, even something quite corrective: "Tell him that the implied lack of love that his version contains is way off the Mark, and misses the level of right thinking entirely." When she then told Bill that, were her words just ego?*

*I strongly disagree with your statement that "we can only save others by changing our own mind." You then generously invite correction on that: "And if I am wrong about that then we do indeed need to have a discussion about **that**; not boomeritis, which only confuses the matter." My response is that we have been doing exactly what you suggest for many years now. We have been emphasizing in much of what we write that helping others behaviorally is central to A Course in Miracles. What has happened, though, is that the boomeritis mindset has largely filtered out, dismissed, or reinterpreted what we have said. That is why, after so many years of that more indirect approach, we have felt that we had to address the boomeritis mindset directly.*

*I don't think that addressing it directly is at all a bad thing. If it were done with malice, or if it became our major focus, that would be another thing. But addressing it as a sidelight in our overall teaching emphasis is useful, I believe. It is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus does in the Course and did privately to Helen and Bill. I realize you think such things are alright when he does them, but not when we do. Yet I see him displaying a different attitude. He often holds up his teaching style as a model for **our** teaching.*

For example, early in the dictation, Jesus gave Helen a miracle principle that sounded more like a Zen koan: “Miracles rest on flat feet. They have no arches.” She complained about how opaque this was: “I don’t see why I should get a message in a way that makes me miss the point and that I have to go into a mental coma to get it.” Jesus’ response is instructive:

*You’ve been doing that all along. You have not even bothered to **look** at the others that are **very** clearly stated. I just thought I’d give you this one in a way you **couldn’t** overlook it. It’s an example of shock effect sometimes useful in teaching students who won’t listen. It compels attention....* (Absence from Felicity, p. 226)

Notice that he characterizes what he is doing as an example of a general principle of good teaching. He is doing what is “sometimes useful in teaching students.” Specifically, he is noting that his students aren’t listening (going into a mental coma), and to solve that problem, he is doing something that “compels attention.” In my discussion of boomeritis, I am just trying to employ this same general principle of teaching.

...

From Eileen Tiedeman:

Your overall response to all those comments confused me. Aren’t we all in the process of waking up? And in our own unique way?

Over twenty years ago I was “ripe” for the Course. I had left the Lutheran Church a year or so before, and was cast in the “wilderness.” I was dealing with a sense of complete failure when I recognized I was unable to accept its doctrines, and felt so guilty for how dishonest I had been for years. So I up and left.

My Canadian cousin Marjean just wouldn’t let up on her frequent message that I needed to read the Course. So really in an attempt to “shut her up,” I bought a copy. Now I still tell her how grateful I am that she didn’t “shut up.”

Initially, I would read it for four or five hours at a time, understanding very little. I just knew instinctively that it was the truth for me. I found it so loving and humorous—and still do.

It seems more the norm for folks to put it down or throw it away a few times before recognizing it for what it is. To me a beautiful love letter.

This experience tells me we each will come to it when we’re ready. Those who try so hard for years to blend ego with Love will learn that our pain tolerance will tell us we really must make a choice between fear and love.

While we can regret their need to suffer, Christ’s patience is truly beyond all understanding. Will putting a name on this really help?

I see the Course’s mandate as one of extending love—which becomes easier as we know we have no other recourse. Your *Better Way* and long list of publications have been and are a blessing to us all.

I have no fear that Love will win out and He’ll use me and does use me to witness to that Love. I just don’t worry about sinners or boomeritis. I’ve been there and done that!!

Eileen,

Thank you for sharing your story. I know many will identify with it. I agree that we will come to the Course in our own time, when we are ripe. But there is another side to it. Your tinder box may have been ripe, but it still needed the match of Marjean’s “frequent message.” Both were crucial. If you had managed to “shut her up” without ever looking at the Course, you have to wonder where you would be now. Your entire life might have been different. I am trying to, in a sense, play her role in relation to boomeritis, which is why I’m trying to be just as persistent in my “frequent message.”

...

From Michael Little:

Just wanted to let you know that I agree with what you’ve written here. The Course, Christianity or any other path is easily undone once we’re willing to be a little less than honest with ourselves. I don’t know if there is any quick remedy for this situation however. Self-deception is the foundation of our world...today it is “Boomeritis,” tomorrow it will have another name. As you’ve well noted, it is simply another game that the ego offers to those who are seeking self-justifica-

tion rather than truth. As a teacher, I feel you are indeed “fulfilling your function” by offering insight and correction into the ego’s numberless errors.

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From Antoinette Atanasoff:

Having just received and completed reading the article on boomeritis here are a few thoughts .

I agree with all of the respondents and all your answers. I was born during the latter part of the depression and it seems that with each decade/generation collectively we become aware of a dis-ease of some nature....Truly boomeritis is part of the “me” generation....The Course was given to me over ten years ago, my questions were answered....If sincere students of ACIM practiced the Course as Jesus asks us to, how can so much uncertainty and doubt be prevalent? I do empathize with Phil and agree with his remarks—the information and opinions coming at us can be overwhelming....

What is true can never die or fade away. The Course will always reach those who call for help, guidance, and love. To me the antibody or antiviral for boomeritis would be, collectively, forgiveness: “Forgive us *our* sins, i.e. errors, mistakes.”

Aren’t we all points of light linking up with all the other points of light with the intention to receive and hold and radiate the blessings and truth on behalf of all humanity and all life? If we have a candle and light up every other candle we do not lose the light but gain more light.

Truly it is not what we do that undoes the dream (and boomeritis), but what we are, our holiness....

You are a voice Robert, calling to Course students collectively, really calling to Jesus to help us remove the barriers and allow us to see the solutions. Jesus answers every call.

RECENT WEB SITE POSTINGS

Here are some of the articles we have recently posted on our website:

Course Meets World Commentary by *Greg Mackie*. This month Greg has posted the following commentaries relating *A Course in Miracles* to a topic “in the news”: “Can Evolution Be Reconciled with God?”; “Taking Your Mugger Out to Dinner”; and “Pain Is Deception; Joy Alone is Truth.” [Read more.](#)

Questions and Answers by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to several questions this month: “How do I apply the Course to parenting teens?”; “Should we be guided by the words of the Course or directly by the Holy Spirit”; and “Does the Course recommend telling others ‘You made that’?” [Read more.](#)

Circle Course Community

Click [here](#) to become a Circle Course Community member, if you would like to read these articles and participate in these activities.

New PathMap articles by *Robert Perry*. The Text contains a number of highly effective practices, which are nearly indistinguishable from the practices found in the Workbook. Robert has posted two new pieces on Text practices:

“Shorter practices from the Text” This handout contains a number of the shorter practices found in the Text, along with suggestions for how to use them.

“Longer practices from the Text” This article contains many of the longer practices found in the Text, complete with commentary on them to make them more meaningful and useable.

New PathMap Questions and Answers by *Robert Perry*. “While doing Lesson 60, forgiveness jumped out at me. I particularly feel at a loss with it and struggle with finding an effective way to help me to remember and practice throughout the day. What are your thoughts on the one-two-three method for forgiveness as I interpret from Gary Renard?”