

# AN INVITATION TO CONSIDER CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CLASS INSTRUCTION

*How can I learn more about God and the nature of His creation? How can I find out more about who I am and what I'm here to do? How will this be of benefit as I endeavor to share what I know with others in my community and beyond who are searching for God and healing? For answers to questions such as these, the Sentinel went to five people around the world. All of them are authorized to teach and practice Christian Science healing—***ALESSANDRA COLOMBINI** of São Paulo, Brazil; **JILL GOODING** of East Molesey, England; **DAVID HAUGHTON** of Bath, England; **LYNN JACKSON** of Lubbock, Texas; and **KEITH WOMMACK** of Corpus Christi, Texas. Senior Writer Warren Bolon gathered them together recently in a telephone conference call.

How can those interested in taking Primary class instruction in Christian Science know that they're ready for this step?

**Jill Gooding:** One of the ways to know if you're ready is to ask the question, "Am I hungering and thirsting after righteousness?" Righteousness is really a right relationship with God, or right thinking. "Have I felt that inner impulse of the Christ, leading me, guiding me, sometimes even pushing me to want to know more about God? To help others more effectively, to understand more about this Science of the Christ that Jesus taught?" If that's what you're feeling, then you're really ready for the step of class instruction.

**David Haughton:** When I was considering class instruction in Christian Science, I had already started doing some healing work. I just felt a desire to understand how to do this work more effectively. I was getting quite a number of calls from people requesting treatment through prayer, and I needed to know more about it. This really prompted me to take class instruction—that sense of wanting to love God more, to love my fellow neighbor more, to help mankind.

**Lynn Jackson:** I think prospective students know they're ready when they want to know how to heal, or how to heal better—when they have that curiosity or inquisitiveness that searches and says, "I love everything I'm reading. I may not understand it all, but I want to learn more." Whether we're searching for class instruction, or a better career, or a companion, or whatever, we all know what that deep inner search is, that desire to know more about God.

**Keith Wommack:** I was traveling in a rock 'n' roll band, but also was having people call me for prayerful help, and I just wanted to be more effective and more thorough in giving it. That's what really impelled me to follow through with taking class instruction. So I'd say you are ready when you want to pray and heal more effectively. You are ready when you feel that Christly urging, and are willing to immediately follow through, just as Jesus' disciples dropped their fishing nets and followed him.

**Alessandra Colombini:** In *Science and Health* we have a gauge to see if we are ready or not. On page 323 it says: "Willingness to become as a little child and to leave the old for the new, renders thought receptive of the advanced idea. Gladness to leave the false landmarks and joy to see them disappear,—this disposition helps to precipitate the ultimate harmony." Are we

# Teaching Christian Science shall not be a question of money, but of morals and religion, healing and uplifting the race.

— Mary Baker Eddy, *Manual of The Mother Church*, p. 83

willing “to become as a little child and to leave the old for the new”? Are we glad “to leave the false landmarks”—the false concepts we had before? And are we joyful “to see them disappear”? I believe that “this disposition” of thought renders someone ready for class instruction.

**Are there motivations that typically don't work well in seeking instruction, that might mislead someone?**

**Keith:** Yes, if we are motivated by just wanting to say that we have had class instruction because others whom we appreciate and like have gone through it. It has to be an individual thing, the Christ impelling us, not being motivated by what others are doing.

**Lynn:** I go to the *Church Manual*, where Mrs. Eddy says, “No member of this Church shall advise against class instruction” (p. 87). Mrs. Eddy really saw the value of class instruction, of education in Christian Science. But it has to be individual. We can't go do it because our parents think we should, or our spouse thinks we're ready, or a practitioner is encouraging us in that direction. It really has to be God-impelled. It's between God and the individual.

**Let's say someone has the desire to understand God better and to practice Christian healing. How might he or she pray about whom to apply to for class instruction?**

**Keith:** Mary Baker Eddy tells us that “desire is prayer” (*Science and Health*, p. 1), and a desire for this spiritual instruction is a heartfelt prayer. Every humble prayer prepares us to be led by God. It inspires us to be receptive to the Christian Science teacher God is leading us to. I've found that everything surrounding the class is an opportunity to learn the importance of allowing God alone to lead you.

**Lynn:** That goes along with Mrs. Eddy's poem “Feed My Sheep,” which begins, “Shepherd, show me how to go” (*Poems*, p. 14). We can pray, “Show me if I am ready, whom to apply to, when to apply, and what to say.” Sometimes it gets down to the practicality of asking, “How do I take the first step?”

**Jill:** I love the verbs in that poem: “Shepherd, *show* me how to go.” Then, “I will *listen*”—so the first step is to *listen*—then “*follow and rejoice*.” I think we actually all have the same teacher. Our teacher is always God, never a person. When we're selecting God as our teacher, we are working “out the spiritual which determines the outward and actual” (*Science*

*and Health*, p. 254). I love that passage in Isaiah, where it says, “Yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers” (30:20). The right teacher cannot be hidden from us. The Father will open our eyes to see and feel who is the right teacher for us.

**Alessandra:** I teach in Portuguese, and other teachers teach in other languages, so the person thinking about instruction must take this into consideration. “Will I be able to understand what is said?” This is very practical, but it is important, right? But if we start from the premise of what Jesus said, quoting the prophets, “They shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45), then the language that you can understand will also be the language that is best for you to be taught in. It all stays on a spiritual basis, although the language must be taken into consideration.

**What are some of the obstacles that those interested in class might face?**

**Jill:** Some of the obstacles might be cost, family issues, doubting whether you're ready for it, feeling that you're too young or too old, or the question of getting time off work. But if there were such a thing as “mortal mind”—which there isn't—the one thing it would want to do would be to stop people from taking the step that would destroy it. So as long as you believe in it, it's going to put up every kind of obstacle and say, “You shouldn't do this.” It's only trying to stop the unfoldment of good. Mortal mind will come at the point where one is most vulnerable, to suggest you can't do it for some reason. If we recognize that that is the way it would try to work, then we're not going to be fooled by those suggestions that say we can't do it, or we can't move forward.

**Lynn:** And students sometimes face those same arguments about coming back to association every year.

**Jill:** Yes, this is not just a 12-day class. The continuing nourishment of an association meeting every year is part of the demonstration.

**David:** It's so important to have a right motive, a desire to understand God clearly and one's relationship to God. Sometimes I've found that people simply want to come to the United Kingdom. If the motive isn't right, there seem to be a lot of problems that present themselves. On the other hand, “Right motives give pinions to thought, and strength and freedom to speech and action” (*Science and Health*, p. 454).

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**Alessandra:** In Brazil, distance is an issue, because there are Portuguese-speaking people in Angola, in West Africa, and of course in Portugal, which are all far away from each other. But it's all part of the demonstration, all part of that guidance from God. Demonstration comes not out of willpower, not out of the wrong motives. If you have the right motive, the way will open. Mrs. Eddy says, "The right way wins the right of way . . ." (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 232).

**David:** Even if there may be a teacher in the same town or city where you live, when selecting somebody, it's important that you don't necessarily go to a particular teacher just because he or she is located close to you. It really is a question of just listening deeply to God, and letting God do the outlining. And do not be surprised if God says to you, "You may be living in England, but go to a teacher in Australia."

**Lynn:** Some people think their teacher should be a man or a woman, or somebody older or younger or in-between. Those are physical attributes that really don't enter into the spiritual equation. Mrs. Eddy says, "Adhesion, cohesion, and attraction are properties of Mind," Mind meaning God (*Science and Health*, p. 124). God, or divine Mind, brings all His ideas together, and they come together to bless each other, but not to bind each other.

**Keith:** We can defend our desire for class instruction by just trusting God completely with that desire, because it's a spiritual desire. God protects that desire, and God will lead and care for each student, before, during, and even after the class period. Nothing can interfere with God's work and plan.

**Lynn:** Mrs. Eddy clearly saw class instruction as advancement, and warns students and teachers against "animal magnetism," which would try to keep us from this spiritual advancement. Animal magnetism is error of action or thought, anything that seems to be going on in our experience that's not good—the feeling, for instance, that we're limited physically because of age or financial lack. One great thing that students learn in taking class instruction is the synonym for animal magnetism—the word *nothing*. It is nothing. And we learn to prove that and demonstrate it.

**Jill:** Another way of defining it is "a magnetism toward something that is not Christlike." And that could be limitation, or a personal sense of someone, but it's a magnetism or attraction in the wrong direction.

#### As teachers of Christian Science, what are you looking for in potential students?

**Keith:** I look for those who are seeking to grow in their spiritual understanding, their maturity and grace, who yearn to bless others, who have an open and honest heart, who are willing to let go of previously cherished beliefs and are open to wholly new ideas. Unselfishness, humility, purity, and kindness are qualities that every teacher is looking for.

**Jill:** One of the things I look for is people who not only want to learn more about God, but who want to gain the tools that equip them to go out and heal others. Class instruction is really preparation for being a full-time Christian Science practitioner. All we need after this class is to be practicing. Mrs. Eddy puts obligations on both the teacher and the pupil. She writes of "Christian Scientists, all over the world, who are letterly fit and specially spiritually fitted for teachers . . ." And she also says that the teacher should carefully select "only . . . such as have promising proclivities toward Christian Science" (*Miscellaneous Writings 1883–1896*, p. 315). *Proclivity* is defined as "inclination; tendency; readiness; facility for learning." So it's the pliable, inquisitive, spiritually hungry thought that wants to get these tools and use them to help others—not just to keep ourselves or our family healthy, but to go out and use them to heal mankind.

**Alessandra:** I would like to find Moses in my students. When Moses saw the burning bush, he noticed that it wasn't consumed. He said, "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt" (Ex. 3:3). So if someone comes to me for class instruction, feeling like Moses, they have seen a burning bush—something wonderful about Christian Science—but they want to know more, to know *why*. And then, like Moses, they're going to "lead the people," help others to progress from materialism to spirituality.

#### What actually happens once a class begins?

**Lynn:** It is a very practical two weeks of instruction. I love being able to speak with the students about the oneness of God and man. What does it mean to be "at one with God"? What does it mean to reflect Him? We spend many days just getting a very good sense of the oneness and the uniqueness of God and man, of cause and effect, of Mind and idea. We take a few days to look directly at animal magnetism. What does it try to do? What are its methods? Christian Science remains theory unless we can become very practical in how we handle animal magnetism. We make sure to learn how to give treatments, how to be specific in our prayer. We learn that when thought changes, experience changes. And we end up back on the topic again of God and man, realizing the allness and the oneliness of spiritual being. The question-and-answer format that Mrs. Eddy used really helps to draw students out, and sometimes reveals things that need to be rethought and healed, so that we can advance spiritually.

**Keith:** I find that the class time is just plain thrilling. It's where the dynamics of supreme Spirit are discovered, felt, and examined. There's something so wonderful that happens when a group of spiritually hungry people come together and discover the practical healing power of God, the one and only Mind as explained in Christian Science. Together, the students and I experience a freshness and joy that's above and beyond anything material. We learn how divine Love constitutes and animates everyone and all things. We explore and feel what it means that Life is Spirit and all-spiritual. We learn how

to deal with the false claims of a power apart of God—what evil or animal magnetism is, how it seems to operate, and how to prove its nothingness. We explore the effectiveness and fun of prayer. Some of the questions I may ask during class are: Does God control the human body? How can prayer work for those across the globe? If a spouse or friend tells us they don't love us anymore, what can we do? What is the difference between spiritual individuality and personality?

**Jill:** Everyone who comes to class has got their toolbox. They've already got the Bible, *Science and Health*, all of Mrs. Eddy's writings. But just like a carpenter, the student has to learn how to use the tools. We learn to use these tools more effectively so that we can be able to pray and heal effectively. I give out very full references in those books at the end of each day's session. I love to feel that the students will go back and get their inspiration and their information from the Pastor—from the books. I don't want them to get it from a person. So yes, there certainly is homework. But it's not something that's compulsory. People have different appetites for study. That food, that spiritual nourishment, is there for them during class, and after class, forever—they can go back to those class notes.

**David:** It is always coming from the books, not from a person. I also do not make the citations to study compulsory. It's so important that after the teaching session, the students go away and spend time in deep, quiet communion with God, really opening their hearts to understand what God is revealing to them through the inspired Word of our textbooks. The teaching is about learning how to get our hearts right with God. As thought becomes more and more in tune with God, it is just natural for students to start healing, even during the time they're taking class.

**Alessandra:** In my case, I can't give as many references, because we don't have all the writings of Mary Baker Eddy in Portuguese. So I give them the references I can, but I also give specific questions for them to think about as homework, so that they are led to think more deeply about what has been said in class.

**How do you see your responsibilities as a teacher once class is completed?**

**David:** I'm always available for them to talk to me about anything to do with Christian Science and class instruction. I will never charge them for that. I'm just there to help them progress in their understanding of God, and the only time I would charge them is if they come to me for treatment in my role as a practitioner. Each student progresses at a different rate. Some move forward in leaps and bounds; others struggle with various concepts. Sometimes there is a need, even during the class, to have one-to-one sessions with students, to help clarify thoughts that seem to be bothering them. It's an ongoing nurturing of the student, a forever relationship.

**Jill:** Mrs. Eddy put that obligation on teachers. She says, "The teacher shall hold himself morally obligated to look after the welfare of his students, not only through class term, but after it; and to watch well that they prove sound in sentiment, health, and practical Christian Science" (*Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 315). And as a practitioner, one has one's ear very close to the ground as to what are not just individual needs, but the sort of collective needs of mankind, which can be very specifically addressed at an association.

**Lynn:** And this requirement for nurturing is stated in the *Manual*: "He [the teacher] shall persistently and patiently counsel his pupils in conformity with the unerring laws of God, and shall enjoin them habitually to study the Scriptures and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* as a help thereto" (p. 83).

**Keith:** Whether it's letters and e-mails, office visits and phone calls, or at our yearly association meetings, it's my responsibility to make sure that they're all loved and cared for. I expect them to turn to God, to pray daily, to study the Bible and *Science and Health*. I expect them to heal. I expect them to be a better person, a better husband, son, and daughter. I expect them to be active in society, in their families and churches, to be more loving, more caring, more dynamic and Christly.

**Alessandra:** And I expect students to be in touch with me. I try to be in touch with them as much as possible. I don't only wait for them to be in touch with me. Of course, we encourage them to apply what they have learned, because if they tell me how they are applying these ideas, then they feel encouraged to do more.

**How can someone go about finding a teacher?**

**Keith:** The best place to start is in *The Christian Science Journal* or a *Herald of Christian Science*. They list Christian Science practitioners who are also teachers. Some people become familiar with teachers through the teacher's lecture work or articles in the periodicals. But there are many wonderful teachers who do not lecture or write articles. Many have found it helpful to just open the *Journal* and make a list of a few names, and then call and have a talk about class.

**Jill:** If you read an article in the Christian Science periodicals that rings a bell with you, call up that teacher, talk to him or her. That person is not going to railroad you into anything. Just get acquainted with some of them. They'll love to talk to you, and share ideas. If you're interested in class instruction, teachers very often will ask you to fill out a form. It's not an examination, just a way that the teacher can get to know you better. We're all in this together. We're all wanting to know more about God. **ics**