

Parented and parenting by divine love

A conversation with Jane Dickinson-Scott

By Suzanne Smedley

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Once a mom—or "mum," as the British would say—always a mom. "Parenting is a 24/7 occupation that stretches ahead of us as far as we can see," JANE DICKINSON-SCOTT says with a wisdom born of raising six children. Nevertheless, mothering—not only her children and five grandchildren, but countless other people who have come into her life—has clearly been one of her greatest joys and challenges.

As a young woman, Jane first trained in baby and childcare in her native England, and later worked in hospitals and residential care homes for children. Broadening her sense of family, she joined Voluntary Service Overseas, which sent her to work for Save the Children Fund with Tibetan refugees in Northern India. And after receiving a diploma in social work, she continued her career in the United Kingdom, helping young people in detention centers, single mums from deprived and broken homes, and families in crisis.

Ultimately, it was Jane's great love for God and deep desire to heal the troubling circumstances facing humanity that led her into the full-time healing practice of Christian Science three decades ago. Today she is a Christian Science teacher and lecturer.

An avid reader, Jane lives in the picture-postcard town of Scarborough, where she loves to walk her dog along the cliffs beside the sea.

Jane, I understand that your family came into Christian Science as a result of healing.

Yes. My great uncle was healed of a debilitating illness through reading *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. It was quite a dramatic and clear-cut healing that changed his life completely—from total incapacity to normal health and activity. This healing happened way back in the early 1900s, and it introduced my family to Christian Science. My mother was a Christian Scientist, and although my father wasn't, we were raised in it. We didn't live near a Christian Science church, so my sister and I very rarely attended Sunday School or met another Christian Scientist.

At some point you obviously made Christian Science your own and felt it made sense to you. When did that happen?

When I was seventeen, I spent three months as an au pair in Switzerland, which was a great experience. It was a serious growing time for me, and I had a healing that was a turning point in my life. I was away in the mountains, looking after children while their parents skied. I became quite unwell with flu. I felt absolutely dreadful. I couldn't even stand up. But I felt even more awful because I wasn't able to care for the children, and I thought I was letting down the family for whom I worked.

I remember one night I was unable to rest and feeling seriously sorry for myself. I reached out to God and this thought came: "Look up, you have a choice." It really spoke to me. And I laughed. (We always seem to get the "angel messages" from God that are tailor-made for us, appropriate angels they are!) That important message encouraged me to (figuratively) look up to God and acknowledge His presence—to "look away from the body into Truth and Love ..." (*Science and Health*, [p. 261](#)). Within moments, I was truly feeling that embracing love of God. I had a very short sleep and woke up with energy, ready to take on the day. Until that time my mother had always prayed for me, so this healing, which was a direct result of my own prayer, was a landmark for me.

Soon after my few months in Switzerland I began a two-year training in childcare, and shortly after completing that, I volunteered for work with Save the Children Fund. This took me to Northern India where I worked with Tibetan refugees for a year. This experience massively increased my ability to stand on my own feet and my confidence in God. It really drew from me such a desire to help people. I had always loved young people and children, but I just ached to help more. And when I returned to the UK from India, I trained in social work. That gave me the opportunity to work with families in need, offenders, and single mums.

Parallel to this, my spiritual sense of things was growing and my understanding of Christian Science, too. At this point, I was finally becoming ready to stand up as a Christian Scientist. I reasoned that if God and my relationship to Him/Her were relevant and practical to my everyday life—and Christian Science certainly shows this to be true—then it was the kind of religion I was keen to be involved with—a way of life that is relevant all day long, not just a Sunday kind of denomination.

As I continued my social work, I found I was increasingly praying over the difficult situations that I was coming across. The seed of my practice of Christian Science was growing. And I realized that Christian Science could meet mankind's challenges in far deeper ways than any human support system.

Can you elaborate?

I began to realize that more than anything else, Christian Science gets to the core of problems by cutting right through to reality. In other words, Christian Scientists pray from the basis of spiritual reality—of God's perfection and man's perfection. Not by thinking we have to patch up a human situation or problem, and make it better.

At the same time, life was changing for me. I got married and started a family, and I took Christian Science class instruction, which answered my many questions, gave me the tools of the practice, and of course, fueled me with the joy of spiritual seeing. That wonderful teaching opened my thought to the realities of being. I remember it was as though a veil had been lifted from my thought, and I was seeing for the first time.

I think my practice really began in earnest from that time, although it was years later before I was listed as a Christian Science practitioner in the *Journal*. Right alongside the busy occupation of being a full-time mum of a big family, I was learning to watch God at work.

Jane, after you went into the full-time healing practice you served as a visiting Christian Science prison minister for six years in London prisons, including a women's prison. Do you have an example that would illustrate how this spiritual approach to social work is effective?

I loved my time serving as a visiting Christian Science prison minister. Each time I approached the gates and locked doors of the prison, I found it helpful to pause and pray. I acknowledged that man or woman was in truth never imprisoned—never held in restrictive circumstances—never fettered by matter, but was always upright and free. It was an essential place to keep my thought. I had many opportunities to see the light of the Christ touch a prisoner's thought.

One experience, which meant a lot to me, really helped me see more of the nature of God's fathering and mothering, and of God's individual care for us. I was in the chaplaincy office when a call came through from one of the units asking for a member of the chaplaincy team to come down to the unit to try to help a young teenager who was violent and very distressed. A number of people—officers, ministers, and a nurse—had already been trying to help. I was asked to have a go.

When I reached the unit, there was another unrelated incident being dealt with, giving me a few minutes to wait before I was allowed to open the hatch into the young woman's cell. Because of her behaviour, I was not allowed to go into the cell, but just speak to her through the narrow hatch in the door. During my wait outside her room I could hear her anguished screaming and violent kicking and hammering on the furniture and the door. As I turned to God, I shut out this noisy, mental picture as best I could. I didn't shut it out in order to ignore the obvious need, but so that I could pray more effectively about it. I affirmed that our Father-Mother God loved this young girl, and I acknowledged that there was no power to prevent either her or me from seeing and feeling the active presence of divine Love and the wisdom of divine Mind.

I should perhaps comment that it was, of course, not for me to judge her because of the behavior that had brought her to prison, or even to know whether she was guilty or innocent. My job as a visiting prison minister was to give support and to bear witness to the Christlike child of God. I continued to pray with these ideas, until after a few minutes I was allowed to open the hatch and talk to this prisoner.

As soon as she saw me, she screamed abuse and started to throw things at the hatch. Possibly foolishly, I asked her to be quiet and tell me how I could help her. This elicited the angry response, "Get me out of here. You can't get me out, so I'm not going to talk to you—go away" (the language she used was somewhat more colorful!)

At that moment the situation seemed overwhelming. She was utterly overwhelmed by her imprisonment, and for a split second I felt utterly powerless to help her. But I knew that God was not. Immediately, a paraphrase of one of Mary Baker Eddy's poems came to thought: "O gentle presence, peace, joy and power ... You keep this, Your precious child, on upward wing tonight, today, this minute." The full verse reads:

O gentle presence, peace and joy and power;
O Life divine, that owns each waiting hour,
Thou Love that guards the nestling's faltering
flight!
Keep Thou my child on upward wing tonight.
(Poems, p. 4)

Trying to ignore the missiles being thrown at me, I found myself saying, "I know that being in here must be dreadful. But tell me why you need so badly to be out of here?" The young woman stopped yelling and came across to the hatch and continued crying. But they were gentle tears. She said her three young brothers and little sister didn't know where she was. I suggested to her that we could get in touch with the family and tell them where she was. Then she lowered her voice to a whisper. She said, "You don't understand, we live on the street, I'm the only mum they've got."

It often comes as a surprise to people to hear that God loves them.

Right there in the cell, this young girl, who was barely more than a child herself, was expressing qualities of commitment, responsibility, care, and love—parenting qualities. Right where that extremely unmanageable, frustrated teenager was, there was actually a caring, concerned single mum. I drew her attention to those qualities, and I assured her—reassured her—that her divine Father-Mother loved her and her brothers and sister, and was caring for them at that very moment. It often comes as a surprise to people to hear that God loves them. But she really listened and accepted these truths just like a thirsty traveler drinking a long, cool glass of water after a difficult, hot, and lonely journey.

I was then able to go into the cell and talk with her, and her thought was gently turned around. Later that day she was able to cooperate with those who could help her and her family. To me, it was such a wonderful example of the Christ—God's message to us—doing its work, meeting the need, telling us we are loved. And it was the Christ that cut through that anguished atmosphere.

It's not a personal love—our love—but divine Love that always reaches and transforms human consciousness, especially thought that seems so unreachable. That's somewhat of a relief, isn't it, to know you aren't responsible for making that happen.

Absolutely. God is totally the doer. Our only responsibility is to remember that divine Love is responsible for and caring for every individual and every situation. God is the speaker. God is the connector. God is the only voice to every child, man, and woman. God is Truth and voices the truth about who we are. The Christ, voicing truth, breaks through doubt and fear, lack of confidence, or self-hatred—whatever the mesmeric situation is that claims to cloud our view of reality.

We often hear people say they feel spiritually inadequate to respond to another's need for that freeing message. But ...

... it always gets back to Love. And it's God that impels that love. It makes me think of Ananias in the Bible when Saul had his conversion on the road to Damascus, and Ananias was asked to meet him and take him into the Christian community. I just love Ananias. He makes me laugh and cry every time I read about him. He is such an obedient servant of God, but even he has a little argument with God.

When God basically tells him, "Go down and meet Saul of Tarsus," Ananias answers something like, "Do you really mean Saul? Surely not Saul of Tarsus—look what he's been doing to us! You can't really want me to go and meet him." Ananias was so brave because he knew that Saul had permission to take any one of the Christians into captivity. But when God spoke with Ananias and explained that he had work for Saul, later known as Paul, he no longer queried the instruction. He went to meet Saul and didn't seem to fear the consequences. He was able to call him "Brother Saul" ([Acts 9:17](#)).

I find that so moving. Ananias just cut right through the human picture and expectation and let go of any human history he knew about Saul. God's message to him about Saul's true nature as His beloved son took precedence. And Ananias responded to that message. We may not be doing dramatic things like him. But each of us, maybe in smaller ways, has the opportunity to be obedient to God and love our brother as Ananias did.

Jane, changing gears, as the mom of six grown children and grandma to five grandchildren, you've obviously had loads of experience praying about the many issues facing parents today—one of which

is feeling that they have no time, or that they can't do everything well because they have so much on their plate.

Parents are juggling a huge amount in their lives. So it's understandable that they sometimes think, "I didn't do very well," or "I don't have time," or "I wish I could do it differently." When we have these concerns, it's helpful to remember Mary Baker Eddy's spiritual definition of *day*, which includes the following statement: "The objects of time and sense disappear in the illumination of spiritual understanding, and Mind measures time according to the good that is unfolded" (*Science and Health*, [p. 584](#)). It's so important, as parents and grandparents—anyone, really—to be grateful for the good we have done, the things we have achieved, and not to dwell on all the things that we haven't, and let that undermine us.

Every issue that comes up in parenting comes back to the point that there is one divine Parent, or Father-Mother, that is hands-on and with our children every moment.

In my experience as a former high school teacher, I know that the teen years especially can be challenging, not only for the teens, but for their parents or guardians.

Yes, and we pray for our children whether we know quite what they're up to—or not! And we're led by divine Principle to do what we think is right and to discipline as needed. Principle, of course, is one of the seven synonyms Mrs. Eddy gave for God, which is so helpful in understanding the breadth of divine parenting. Interestingly, the word *discipline* and the word *disciple* come from the same Latin root. Jesus was helping his disciples to be obedient to God, good, and that's really what we're doing as parents. Jesus was literally teaching the disciples (and us, too, as modern-day disciples) about their relationship to God, and this is what informed their actions.

In the same way, we are recognizing in our children their natural obedience to God, as Principle, and their desire to do the right thing. Starting from this spiritual standpoint, it follows that the human labels such as "terrible two's" or "difficult teenagers" fall away. There's only one label, and that is the name and nature of God's child. The name of each of us as an individual idea of God, the immediate reflection of Him/Her.

So many influences seem to undermine the right sort of education, which frees us from burdening human lables. I think Mary Baker Eddy got it right when she wrote, "The entire education of children should be such as to form habits of obedience to the moral and spiritual law, with which the child can meet and master the belief in so-called physical laws, a belief which breeds disease" (*Science and Health*, [p. 62](#)). How do you educate children and young people in this direction?

I love that phrase "habits of obedience." A habit is something that comes so naturally to us that we almost do it without thinking. Young children know their names and their ages, and where they live, from a very early age. Just as confidently each child can know his or her identity as God's precious son or daughter.

Then it becomes natural and normal for each one to think and reason from that spiritual identity as the unique and loved and lovable idea of divine Mind.

Being inseparable from God, children are obedient to God, or good. And being Truth's idea means that it's natural for them—for all of us—to be loving, truthful, honest. It's our default position, how we have been designed.

Understanding their spiritual nature and individual worth enables young people to be themselves, to be true to themselves, and to God's purpose for them. That way they make the choices in thinking and activities that are productive and loving. It enables them to quickly and naturally turn to God for healing.

All of God's ageless offspring include the tangible qualities of wisdom, maturity, spontaneity, and thoughtfulness.

As my children have grown, I've tried to pray more and say less.

So an adult doesn't need to enforce obedience to God, or what they think is good for children.

I remember an experience we had with one of our daughters. She has a lot of tantrums when she was just over two. During the day we would go through four, five, six times when she would fling herself on the floor and have a bellow and a scream about something or another. I was really praying about this—why we were clashing when she didn't want to do this or that. I prayed to understand that harmony was already established and maintained by divine Principle, Love, and humbly listened to the Father-Mother to tell me—to show me the truth about this precious daughter who is obedient to good, is the happy, satisfied child of God now.

And the thought came very clearly to me that I needed to change my attitude toward her. I needed to respect the fact that she was a DIY (do-it-yourself) girl who knew she was mature! I needed to treat her as though she knew everything, could already do everything. Now she was two, but she had older brothers and sisters.

I discussed it with my husband, and we agreed that we would not say to her, for example, "Let's put your shoes on now," or "I'll help you get dressed," whatever you might normally do for a two-year-old. We'd just say, "Please put your shoes on," and so on. "If you need any help, just let us know." And do you know, by treating that little one as already having all the skills she needed as a mature idea, we didn't let her down, but she never had another tantrum. She asked for help when she needed it, but her whole attitude changed. We didn't give in to her but we were respecting her.

As parents, we have to be ready to change. Sometimes we have to be ready to stand firm—with teenagers, for example. To be consistent and calm and hold up that standard of good that we feel is necessary in the home. At other times, it may be right to be more flexible. Mind will give each parent what they need to know as they listen.

What qualities make any parent or adult approachable, would you say?

Hmm, good question!

I'm sure there are so many ways of answering that. For me, unconditional love is the core quality. That includes a nonjudgmental attitude and sincere respect, and recognition of, the spiritual nature of each of God's sons and daughters. Also, to have patience and to give them time.

Listening is important; really listening to someone doesn't give the impression that you've already made up your mind before they speak. And a gentle sense of authority—not arrogance. Jesus spoke with authority because he expressed the Christ. Young people—all people—are attracted to that quality of firm but gentle confidence. They don't want life to be wavering. They want the ground to be solid, and they're looking for that solid ground. But more than anything, unconditional love is needed.

All of these qualities, and so many more, are ours by reflection from our divine Parent. Whether we have children or not, we show those God-given qualities—in the office, the shopping mall, at church, and on the sports field.

That addresses any concern that we might not have natural parenting abilities.

We might not always feel that we're "natural" parents, but we are! We don't have a separate identity from God, who includes every quality necessary for good parenting. So although parenting may be new to us (and for most of us, it is a steep learning curve), it's not new to God. We have all the ideas we need to grow in our fathering and mothering day by day. We're lovingly parented by our divine Parent, even as we parent our own children, and the world's.

What if, despite a parent's best efforts, they feel they've failed in some way, and they follow their child "off the rails" as you once put it to me, perhaps into worry, or anger, or self-condemnation.

My heart goes out to any parent feeling that they have failed; we all do feel that way at times. But we have to be firm with ourselves and not buy into this, or to lay blame. Hanging on to selfcondemnation or guilt undermines our natural confidence and authority—not arrogance, but authority—as the expression of God's mothering and fathering nature. But it doesn't mean we shouldn't be alert to learning or changing.

Examining our motives in parenting is so important. Mrs. Eddy wrote, "Working and praying with true motives, your Father will open the way" (*Science and Health*, [p. 326](#)). To want to serve God and do our best is a "true" motive.

With that right motive we can forgive ourselves for things we've done wrong, just as we would anybody else. I think that's quite important.

You know, we are not our children's creator. Nor are we the creator of our children's happiness, or their careers, or their schooling, or their friendships. God is the Creator, so as human parents we watch how God is working all of these things out in their lives. How God has the very best in store for them.

As my children have grown, I've tried to pray more and say less [laughter]. I am still working on that!

Understanding that God is Creator takes care of any temptation a parent might have to live through their children, or to push an agenda, or plan for them.

Yes, or to think they must be going down the wrong road. You know, we don't know ... but if a young person goes off the rails, or chooses a path that we are not happy about, we still maintain our understanding of who is with them, who is caring for them, who is protecting them, and what is guiding them. We know that there is only *one* influence in their lives—a divine influence that is "ever present in human consciousness" (*Science and Health*, [p. xi](#)).

That applies to all of us as members of the same family, parented by the same loving Mother-Father.

As members of God's family, we can each feel the tender, powerful presence of the divine Parent embracing, guiding, and protecting us. Mrs. Eddy gave this wonderful promise: "With one Father, even God, the whole family of man would be brethren; ..." (*Science and Health*, [pp. 469–470](#)).

In our prayers for the world, we can acknowledge that each of us is inseparable from this Father and from His universal family. We are truly one family, "held in the gospel of Love" (*Science and Health*, [p. 577](#)).

JSH

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