

## IS THERE STILL POWER IN POSITIVE THINKING?



**IF WE COULD TAKE EVERY CHILD ON THIS PLANET, AND TEACH THEM TO  
MEDITATE ON COMPASSION FOR ONE HOUR PER WEEK,  
WE COULD END ALL VIOLENCE ON THIS PLANET. – THE DALAI LAMA**

**PEOPLE NEED TO REACH OUT AND FOCUS ON COMPASSION.  
THAT IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE BEGIN  
TO REACH TOWARD GOD AND LEAVE THE EGO BEHIND.**

*Scripture:*

**Luke 13:10-17**

<sup>10</sup>Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup>And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup>When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ <sup>13</sup>When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. <sup>14</sup>But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.’ <sup>15</sup>But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? <sup>16</sup>And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?’ <sup>17</sup>When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.



### **THIS MOMENT**

**By John H. Cushman**

**This moment -- right now -- is your life.  
Breathe in; breathe out.**

**How shall we use this moment?  
Waiting? How long?**

**Remembering? What moment's more important than the present?  
Praying? How can God use me today?  
Connecting? Can my moment be magnified by sharing?**

**This moment is your life.  
Breathe in; breathe out.  
Gone. Used up. Consumed.**

**Did I use my moment well, O Lord?  
Will you give me another?**

**We need to focus upon what we have,  
not what we've lost.**

There comes a special time in our lives when God calls us to move on -- from our ego to our ambition. To move on from what defines us to what inspires us; to move on from self-image and constraint to the continual discovery of an unfolding life of meaning and contributing our moments to the good of others.

If you have seen Tom Brokaw's "Boomers" documentary on television this week, you will know that many of the Boomers had such great hope when they left home to enter their society; and now they long to recover that hopeful vision as they reach their maturity. And yet, so many of the hopes with which they began remain unrealized. Money didn't buy happiness, sex did not produce security, affluence and consumption did not produce wealth, and reputation did not create self esteem.

So today, let us ask: How far have we wandered in search of inner peace? And in the afternoon of life, we make a great discovery. Those who found themselves were those who lost themselves in the service of others, in the service of a great and worthy cause, and in the service of God. I'll have more about that in a moment.

### **JESUS HEALS THE PARALYZED WOMAN**

The healing of the crippled woman is unique to the Gospel of Luke. To illustrate it, we have used the famous Andrew Wyeth painting, *Christina's World*.

Interpreting this painting is a parable of healing itself. Andrew Wyeth painted a young woman lying on the treeless ground, crawling toward a grey house on the horizon. The painting is based upon a real woman with a muscular deterioration that paralyzed her lower body. Christina reaches toward that house. Her body is still and uncooperative. It will take her a long time to cross the field in front of her. The artist observed her struggle. But I say she will make it, and this painting will tell the story of this small triumph.

If you see this as a sad painting then you see a story of a woman who lived with severe limitations. If you see this as a hopeful scene, then you see a woman who will cross a great distance to reach her goal. It's up to you.

Sharon Bressoud told us of a young Olympic skier who turned her paralysis into fine water color paintings because she focused not upon what she had lost, but upon what she had left.

In this picture of Christina's world, a handicap is a mere obstacle, but not a barrier. Will she make it? I know she will.

### **FROM BENDING TO STANDING**

Jesus healed a nameless woman by giving her the freedom to unbend and stand up straight after she had lived for years in crippling bondage. The woman had not asked to be healed. She simply found herself in Jesus' presence -- and that led to healing and new life for her, as it had done for others.

This beautiful story, however, is not without conflict. Jesus healed the woman in sacred space (a synagogue, mentioned twice) and within sacred time, namely on a Sabbath (noted no fewer than five times), and he was criticized for this breach of the law. Jesus insisted that the synagogue and the Sabbath were not the only things that are holy -- so was this woman's life. She was a daughter of the promise -- "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29) Jesus calls her a "daughter of Abraham."

He turned to his critics and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"

Then he set her free to stand straight. The Sabbath was meant for healings such as this. Women have little difficulty identifying with this daughter of the promise.

Miriam Winter writes:

**Surely  
You Meant  
When you lifted  
Her up  
Long ago  
To your praise  
Compassionate One  
Not one woman  
Only  
But all women  
Bent  
By unbending ways.**

This event represents an important part of the ministry of Jesus. He gave healing and hope to people who were disabled in physical, emotional and mental ways. The story of the crippled woman deals with physical healing, but it has a larger dimension. Her twisted body, permanently bent downwards, was a symbol of all those who lack hope. The story teaches that with Jesus' help, we can raise ourselves so that our vision is upwards, toward God.

### **FROM THE MORNING TO THE AFTERNOON OF LIFE**

Let me bring this historic healing moment into the present.

In the "morning of our life," the early part of our life, we are conditioned to believe that who we are is what we are able to collect. We are conditioned to believe that we are what we are able to do, and we are what other people think of us. So we evaluate our essence as human beings by how well we are received by others, and what we have been able to accumulate, and how "far ahead we get."

But there is something missing in all that, and that is what we call meaning – the great hunger of life. We long to do something worthy and significant. If you know someone for whom life is all about what you win, and what other people think of you, then they may get a great reputation. Or not.

**But reputation is not the measure of faith.**

**And when people retire they learn  
that if you are what you do,  
when you don't,  
then you aren't.**

And if you are what you have, when it disappears, your essence as a human being disappears as well. Natural disasters can change what we have in an instant; unnatural accidents and calamities change lives in a moment.

Jesus taught otherwise.

So meaning has to be grounded in something else. Meaning is spiritual. Meaning is about what we will do for love.

Dr. Wayne Dyer talked about this "shift" in a recent interview.

He said, "The shift is what Carl Jung described as what happens to you when you move into the afternoon of your life. This is when you begin to focus not so much on what the ego says – "what's in it for me, and how far ahead of everyone else have I gotten - but upon a new mantra. It is the mantra of the higher self, the spiritual self, which asks, "How can I serve?" This is the God realization – lifting our thinking to God's thinking." The shift is from "What can I get?" to "What do I have to give?"

There is a teaching from the Dalai Lama. "If we could take every child on this planet, and teach them to meditate on compassion for one hour per week, we could end all violence on this planet." (Paraphrased by Wayne Dyer) People need to reach out and focus on compassion, and that is what happens as you begin to reach toward God and leave the ego behind.

Dyer says that he would advise anyone to quit a job that does not bring them fulfillment, and give them the feeling that they are living their lives on purpose. If you don't quit it, it will quit you. It will take you down. You'll see the results of it in higher blood pressure and all kinds of sicknesses, and broken relationships.

We each have a calling in this world. And the idea that we have to be in competition with someone else to experience our calling is just a myth. It is a cultural system myth. We're all on the same track. We don't have to win by putting someone else down. I can think of a nice way to illustrate that.

Let Jesus Christ be the guiding force in your life. So we say, instead of chasing after things that do not satisfy, let God chase after you.

### **TWO WANDS**

Assume for a moment that I have two magic wands to give you. In one hand, I have "Wand A," and with that one you can get anything you want ... a new car, new fancy watch, a fancy house, and whatever you want. Wand A is like Aladdin's lamp and you can have it.

Or I can take that back and give you Wand B. And with that wand I can guarantee you that for the rest of your life you will have inner peace; you'll be able to feel fulfilled no matter what. Which one would you take?

You would take Wand B, wouldn't you?

**Wand B is not that you are going to get everything you want, but with that wand, you are going to process everything important in life that comes your way in a manner that is going to bring you inner peace. Even the negative things can bring you inner peace. Wand B will not shield you from life, it will give you hope with which to deal with it.**

The crippled woman found that hope -- to deal with her life in the present moment. -- in Jesus Christ, and so can we. The experience of the living Christ is no myth to those who have found it. And it is more readily found in adversity than it is found when the waters are dead calm.

This moment right now is your life. This is the day that the Lord hath made, be glad and rejoice in it.

How sad if we should miss even one irrevocable day wishing for things that do not satisfy.

So here is Christ's healing, and here is God's blessing: Live your life as if you were on a mission. And this mission is: "How can I serve?"

What makes me so sure that is the right question? Because that is the way the story ends: When Jesus laid his hands on the woman, immediately she stood up straight, and she began praising God. Another translation: "Glorifying God." And that was her mission. It was a mission so important that Luke put it in the Bible. And it was a mission that carried her past this moment, and into every moment.

May God heal you too, so that every day you discover some way in which you too can glorify God.

May you discover that your life is worthwhile, meaningful, filled, and absolutely precious in the Kingdom of God.

You are not in competition with anyone else. You just have to stand up as straight as you can, and glorify God.

Is there still power in positive thinking?

Sure.

Your life is a brief candle. Burn it brightly. Move from ego to ambition. Move from definition to inspiration, and beyond.

Just imagine: *If we could take every child on this planet, and teach them to meditate on compassion for one hour per week, we could end all violence on this planet.*

Progress in that direction would surely glorify God.



**Dr. John H. Cushman  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405  
March 7, 2010**